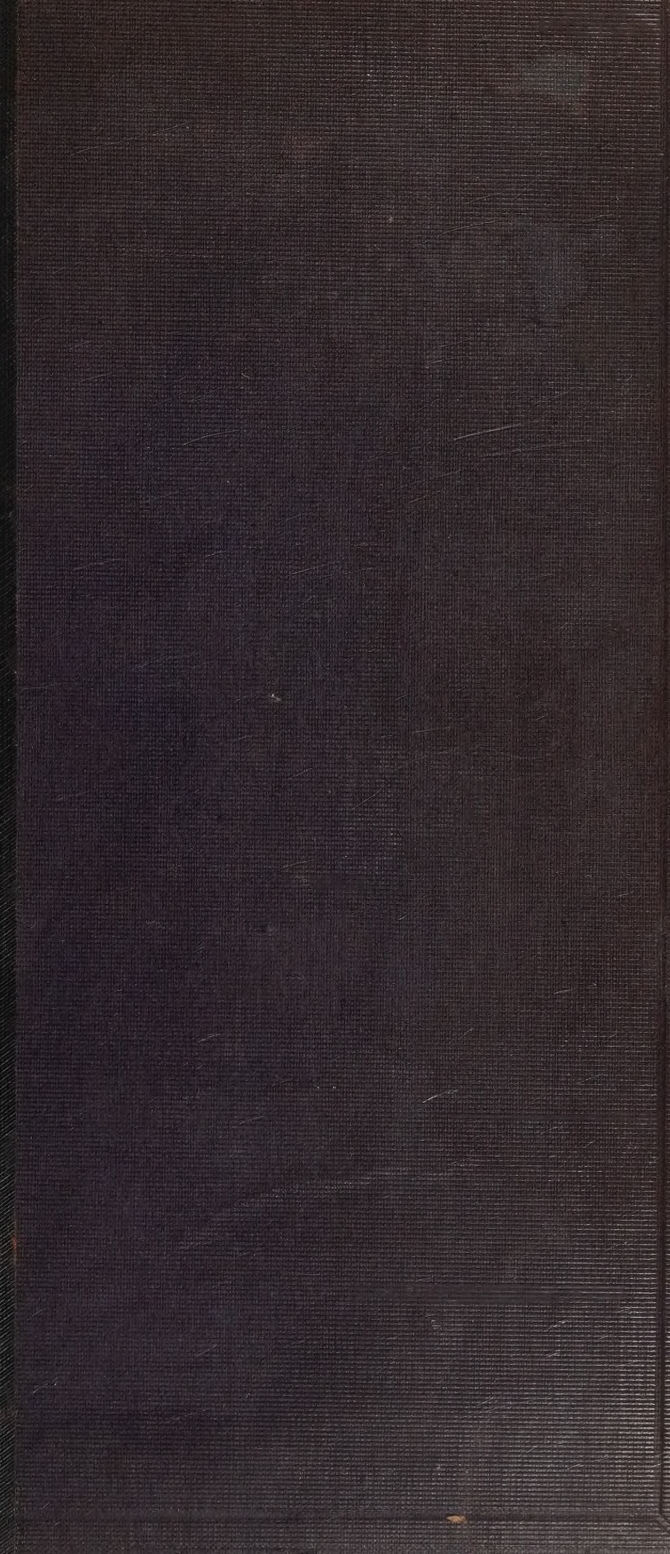




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SERMONS

BY

CHARLES JAMES BLOMFIELD, D.D.

LATE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

LONDON :

PRINTED BY RICHARD CLAY, BREAD STREET HILL.

TWENTY-FOUR

S E R M O N S

ON

CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE,
AND ON THE CHURCH.

BY

CHARLES JAMES BLOMFIELD, D.D.

LATE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

SELECTED FROM SERMONS HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED.

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P R E F A C E.

THE Sermons in this volume have been selected from a large number written by Bishop Blomfield between the years 1824 and 1854, a period which comprises nearly the whole of his Episcopate. Those published before his death are a volume of Sermons preached by him in Bishopsgate Church; a volume of Lectures on the Acts of the Apostles, and on the Gospel of St. John, also preached while he was Rector of Bishopsgate; and some Occasional Sermons. He was never very willing to commit his sermons to the press, probably on account of their rapid composition; and for this reason it is not without hesitation that I now send forth this Volume, in deference to the wishes of some of his friends, who desired a memorial of his preaching. I have not thought it neces-

sary in this selection to choose only such sermons, as would together form a theological compendium, but have preferred giving to the public those which seemed to me, either to have the most merit, or to treat of subjects on which many desire to be informed and guided, or to be useful as practical discourses. The reader will not find in them any new views of theology, for in theology novelty is but a specious name for error; or that affected singularity of expression, which is so often mistaken for originality of thought. They do not attempt to explain mysteries, the elucidation of which lies beyond the limits of the human mind; nor do they discuss the over-refined speculations of modern infidelity: these Sermons are plain and comprehensive statements of Christian truth; and simple, affectionate, and faithful enforcements of Christian duty. What further excellence they may possess it is for others to judge. But it must be borne in mind, that far the larger number were written during the Bishop's incumbency of the See of London; and no one who knows the overwhelming engagements and responsibilities

of that office, will expect to find in these Sermons the full expression of Bishop Blomfield's powers. I venture, however, to point to them, extending, as they do, over a period of thirty years, as an evidence of (what was not always attributed to him) the uniform consistency of his teaching, which was never affected by the shifting opinions of an age of transition. They preserve the middle way of our Reformed Communion, protesting equally against dogmatism and rationalism, against superstition and puritanism; and teaching a piety, zealous without bigotry, and devout without asceticism. It is especially in this respect, as Discourses faithfully representing the true spirit of the Church of England, that I commend them to the judgment, not only of this generation, but also of posterity; for I may well hope for this Volume a more than ephemeral existence, if not for its own merits, at least as a memento of one who has left to the Church, as his best legacy, not his words but his works. I shall not, however, deem their publication useless, if these Discourses serve to keep any member of our Apostolic Communion amidst the excitements

and extravagances of this changeful time ; or to strengthen any child of God amidst the multiplied temptations of an abounding iniquity. It is my earnest prayer to the Chief Shepherd of souls (through Whom alone the best words and works of His servants have any power for good) that they may thus contribute not merely to the honour of their Author, who is beyond the reach of human praise, but to the edification of that Church for which he laboured, and the glory of that Saviour in Whom he lived and died.

FREDK. G. BLOMFIELD.

ST. LEONARD'S-ON-SEA,
February 1859.

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THE INCARNATION ; ITS MORAL NECESSITY.

HEBREWS II. 17.

In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

THE apostle tells his Hebrew converts, that God, who at sundry times and in divers manners had spoken in times past to the fathers by the prophets, had, in that later age, in which they lived, spoken unto them by his Son—the heir of all things, and the creator of the world, the brightness of His Father’s glory, upholding all things by the word of His power, having a better inheritance and a more excellent name than the angels; for God had said to *Him*, what He had not said to any of those blessed spirits of light who stand around his throne and do his pleasure, “*Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*” “*Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.*”¹

¹ Hebrews i. 5. 13.

St. Paul then proceeds to argue, that if every act of disobedience to the law of God, spoken by angels, and by their ministry delivered to man, received a just recompense of reward, "*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation,—spoken by the Lord.*"¹ Obedience is supremely due to *Him*; and that, not only in respect of His eternal Sonship, and superiority to all other messengers and interpreters of God's will, but because He condescended to take upon Him the nature of man. Being infinitely above the highest angels, He consented to take place for a time beneath the lowest; for "*we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.*"² Desiring to make atonement for sin, He consented to undergo its penalty, which could not have been the case, if He had not vouchsafed to take our nature upon Him. "*Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*"³ This constituted the moral necessity of His doing so, of which the apostle speaks in the text: "*for verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham. In all things it behoved Him to*

¹ Hebrews ii. 3.² Ibid. ii. 9.³ Ibid. ii. 14.

*“be made like unto his brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.”*¹ Let us contemplate the scheme of redemption in the point of view presented to us by the inspired writers, and endeavour, by the help of the Holy Spirit, to draw from that contemplation fresh materials for devout admiration and thankfulness.

The doctrines of the Incarnation and Atonement are the foundation truths of the Gospel; the sum and substance of the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh: *“to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness:”*² and if, as the apostle teaches, the Incarnation was necessary, in order to the Atonement, it is plain that the former ought to be made a subject of the most careful consideration and devout inquiry by every one who looks to partake in the benefit which resulted from it. When I speak of consideration and inquiry, I do not mean the curious and unprofitable speculations of those inquirers who attempt to discover that which is not revealed, and to be wise above what is written; who are not satisfied with the knowledge of a truth, unless they understand the *mode* in which it is true; but I mean a serious and reverent examination of the Word of God,

¹ Hebrews ii. 16, 17.

² Daniel ix. 24.

and a humble and thankful acceptance of the truths therein declared to us ; and a spirit of implicit acquiescence in the reasons of His counsels and movements, in so far as He has made them known to us. Now it is important that we should distinguish between the counsels, or purposes, of Almighty God, and the methods of their accomplishment, and not ascribe to the latter the mysteriousness and difficulty which properly belong to the former. Thus, in the instance of man's redemption, the Atonement, or reconciliation of a fallen race to their offended God, by the mediation of His eternal Son, was the original purpose or design : the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, in order to His humiliation and suffering, was the mode by which it was to be effected ; and our wonder ought rather to be excited by the design itself, than by the method of its accomplishment. That the Son of God, out of compassion to His perishing creatures, should have determined to redeem them by His own sufferings, is more astonishing and mysterious, than it is, that, in order to the completion of that design of mercy, He should have taken upon Him the nature of man—although both these truths, separately and together, are subjects of inexpressible wonder and thankfulness : “ *What is man, that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that thou visitest him ?*”¹

¹ Psalm viii. 4.

The whole difficulty of the case, as far as our understanding is concerned, lies in our inability to fathom the depths of God's infinite wisdom—"My thoughts are not your thoughts;"¹ "how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor?"² If His wisdom judged it to be necessary, that the redemption of His fallen creatures should be effected by means of a propitiatory sacrifice of surpassing worthiness, proportioned to the exigency of the case, the assumption of man's nature by the Divine Victim followed as a natural step in the process; and it is in the *former* of its features, rather than the *latter*, that the scheme of redemption is calculated to excite our surprise: although, properly speaking, nothing ought to excite our surprise, which we know to be true upon the authority of God's word. There was no intrinsic worthiness or efficacy in the sacrifices offered under the law of Moses. They set forth a remembrance of sin every year, but did not expiate it. "*In those sacrifices,*" declares St. Paul, "*there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith, Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared me. In burnt offerings*

¹ Isaiah lv. 8.² Romans xi. 33, 34.

*"and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do Thy will, O God."*¹

The assumption of human nature by the Son of God made it possible for Him to offer an infinitely worthy sacrifice ; a full, perfect, and sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. He placed Himself thereby to the whole human race in the relation of a brother : for it was *their* flesh, *their* natural body, which He condescended to take of the blessed Virgin ; *"for which cause,"* says the apostle, *"He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee."*² It is because He thus took our nature upon Him, and became the first of a new spiritual race, that our blessed Lord is with propriety termed *the second Adam*. In that character He repaired the mischief which the first Adam had wrought. By his incarnation He became qualified to do and to suffer whatever God could require to be done or suffered by man. Being of one flesh and one spirit with us, subject to the same law, liable to the same temptations, He was fitted to undertake the office of Redeemer, being at the same time *"holy, harmless, undefiled,"*³ without spot or stain of sin. *"What the law,"* says St. Paul, *"could not do, in that*

¹ Hebrews x. 3—7.

² Ibid. ii. 11, 12.

³ Ibid. vii. 26.

“*it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.*”¹ “*If by one man’s offence death reigned by one ; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.*”²

You perceive now what is meant by the moral necessity of Christ’s Incarnation—the necessity of His taking upon Himself the nature of man, that He might undergo the penalty to be suffered by that nature, for the sins in that nature committed ; a consideration which shows very plainly the erroneousness of an opinion, held by some early heretics, that the human nature in Christ was absorbed by the divine, and so entirely changed into it, as to have no longer any existence.

Yet although the Eternal Son of God thus condescended to assume the nature of man, it was not man’s *sinful* nature which He took upon Himself. He became flesh, but not *sinful* flesh—though the *likeness* of sinful flesh. It behoved our great High Priest not only to be “*merciful and faithful,*” but “*holy, harmless, and undefiled.*” He could not have said of Himself, what every child of Adam *must* say, “*Behold, I was shapen in wickedness ; and in sin hath my mother conceived me.*”³ He was conceived of the Holy

¹ Romans viii. 3.

² Ibid. v. 17.

³ Psalm li. 5.

Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary. By reason of his miraculous conception, He was free from the taint of original sin. "*The Holy Ghost,*" said the angel to the Blessed Virgin, "*shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that HOLY THING which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*"¹ "By the operation of the Holy Ghost," as our Church expresses it, He "was made very man of the substance of the Virgin Mary His mother; and that without spot of sin, to make us clean from all sin."² The human nature was united with the divine in its pure and sanctified state, as it came forth at first from the hands of its Maker; and here again is seen the expressive propriety of St. Paul's designation of Christ as the second Adam. "*In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto his brethren,*" "*yet without sin.*"³ He was to be the Lamb that taketh away the sins of the world, and therefore, like the Lamb of the Passover, to be without blemish. In this sense, then, "*it behoved*" the Saviour, was necessary for Him, "*to be made like unto his brethren;*" that He might suffer in their stead, and reconcile, in His own person, the whole human race to their offended God. "If," says one of the Christian Fathers, "our Lord

¹ St. Luke i. 35.

² Preface in the Communion Service for Christmas-day.

³ Hebrews ii. 17; iv. 15.

“ Jesus Christ had not condescended to become
 “ man, man must have perished. He became
 “ one of those whom He created, that those
 “ whom He created might not be lost.”¹ This
 necessity resulted from the original decree passed
 in the counsels of God for the redemption of
 mankind.

But there is another sense in which the Incarnation may be spoken of as necessary. It had been foretold by the Holy Spirit; and therefore the truth of God was concerned in its coming to pass. Our Saviour himself urged upon the unbelieving Jews, how it was “ *written of the Son*
*“ of man, that He must suffer many things;”*² and St. Peter declares of the prophets, that “ *the*
“ Spirit of Christ which was in them. . . . testified
*“ beforehand the sufferings of Christ.”*³ Isaiah, who foretold His birth of a Virgin, and spoke of Him as the Everlasting God, the Prince of Peace, yet described Him as “ *a man of sorrows,*
“ and acquainted with grief;” “ *oppressed and*
“ afflicted;” “ *brought as a lamb to the slaugh-*
“ ter;” and “ *cut off out of the land of the*
*“ living;”*⁴ which prophecies could not possibly have received their fulfilment, except in one born of a woman, and partaking of the nature of

¹ “ Dominus enim noster Jesus Christus nisi dignatus esset fieri homo, perisset homo. Factus est quem fecit ne periret quem fecit.”
 —Augustine, Sermon xcii. on St. Matt. xxii.

² St. Mark ix. 12.

³ 1 Peter i. 11.

⁴ Isaiah liii.

man. As therefore our blessed Lord asked the disciples on their way to Emmaus, "*Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?*"¹ and as St. Paul reasoned with the Jews of Thessalonica, "*out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead,*"² because the prophets foretold that so it should be; so it may be said, looking to the necessary fulfilment of God's promises, that "*it behoved*" Christ to take upon Him the nature of man.

But the apostle assigns another reason of this necessity: "*In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that He himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.*"³ It was requisite that He should take upon Himself the nature of those whom He came to save, not only that He might suffer that bodily death which was the ordained penalty of sin; but that He might know, by His own personal experience, the evils which He came to remedy, the results of that first transgression which brought sickness, and infirmity, and sorrow, and death into the world; and that, in the knowledge of His having that experience, we might have all the surer grounds

¹ St. Luke xxiv. 26.² Acts xvii. 3.³ Hebrews ii. 17, 18.

of confidence in His compassionate regard toward us. This is a very affecting consideration. It places in the strongest light the condescension and goodness of our Saviour, and brings Him, as it were, within the range of human affections. It represents His love towards us as being of the same kind, though infinitely superior in degree, as that which we feel towards one another—love heightened by sympathy. The apostle's argument would fall with peculiar force upon the mind of a Jew; but it is sufficiently striking and affecting to us all: "*We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin;*"¹ "*For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.*"² And how encouraging is the inference! "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*"³ As if he had said: "Let us approach with confidence the throne of divine grace; for He who sits thereon knows experimentally our weaknesses and wants, and is therefore all the more disposed to forgive the one and

¹ Hebrews iv. 15.² Ibid. v. 1, 2.³ Ibid. iv. 16.

to supply the other. Let us appeal to His own experience of our natural infirmities, to the remembrance of what He himself endured in the flesh, His temptation and His agony; His prayers and tears; and, if we ask in faith, and are deeply penitent for the sins which bring us to Him, we shall find mercy for the past, and grace for the future." Let this be a thought of comfort to every one who has been united to Jesus Christ in Baptism, and who seeks to realise that union in the fruits of a Christian life, when assailed by temptation from within or without: "My Saviour was in like manner tempted in His human nature, and can have compassion upon the weakness of mine; but He overcame His trials, and in His strength let me set myself to overcome mine. He will be merciful to my unavoidable failures, and He will give grace to help me in time of need, if I will but seek for it." How deeply ought we to be moved, in reading the history of our blessed Lord, by the reflection, that He not only died a cruel and ignominious death to free us from the curse of sin, but lived a life of poverty and hardship, and trouble and sorrow, in order that He might be the better qualified, by His own bitter experience, to appreciate the evils which sin brought into the world; and the more disposed to sympathise with those whom He came to redeem from its penalty. He *was*, and *is*, touched with our infirmities; not only by reason

of that surpassing love which led Him at the first, as the Son of God, to undertake the work of man's redemption, but also as having been Himself, as the Son of man, compassed with the same ; surrounded and tried by them in every variety of natural weakness, sin only excepted. And does it not seem to mitigate, as it were, the hardships of our fallen state, when we reflect that our Divine Master endured them before us?—but how much more, when this thought is coupled with the remembrance of His having endured them as a part of the discipline necessary to the perfection of that obedience which was to be accepted as a satisfaction for our sins: “*for it became Him,*” says the apostle, “*for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*”¹ “*Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.*”²

But there is still another and a most important point of view, in which we are authorized to contemplate the necessity of this resemblance between the Saviour and those whom He came to save. It was necessary that He should in all things be made like unto his brethren, that *they* might be made like unto *Him*. He came amongst *them* whom He had determined to save, that He might not only offer a sacrifice, but also set an

¹ Hebrews ii. 10.

² Ibid. v. 8

example. "*Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an ensample, that we should follow his steps.*"¹ As the Son of God, in his divine nature, He could have been no object of imitation to his creatures, except as God himself may be imperfectly imitated in some of His moral attributes; not in personal conduct and demeanour, not as exemplifying, in any course of action, the excellences of which human nature is capable. But as the Son of man, He presented, to those who were His brethren in the flesh, a model of human perfection, attainable, as He himself declared, or at least intelligible, and to be aimed at by them. "*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me.*"² "*I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you.*"³ "*Let this mind,*" says St. Paul, "*be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*"⁴ And St. John assures us that there is no limit, short of a complete resemblance, which should satisfy our desire to be likened to our Divine Master. "*Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world.*"⁵ Conformity to Christ is practicable in so far as we are partakers of the same nature with Him. "*Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his*

¹ 1 St. Peter ii. 21. ² St. Matt. xi. 29. ³ St. John xiii. 15.

⁴ Philippians ii. 5.

⁵ 1 St John iv 17.

“*Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.*”¹ And this is to be effected, on the part of those who have been grafted by Baptism into His mystical body, by a steady contemplation of our Great Example in His human state, and a continual endeavour to embody its lineaments in our own character. “*We all,*” as St. Paul says, “*with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord :*”² and in this sense the Christian is said to “*put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of Him that created him.*”³

We see now the purposes, or *some* at least of the purposes, which were answered by the Incarnation of our blessed Lord, and which would not have been answered, as far as we can judge, had He effected our redemption in any other way; had He taken upon Him the nature of angels, instead of the seed of Abraham, and accomplished our deliverance without experiencing our trials, as a triumphant and not a suffering Saviour. But it is useless, if not presumptuous, to speculate upon what *would* or would *not* have happened, had our Redeemer chosen any other way of accomplishing his purposes of mercy. We know that the way which He *did* choose, being predetermined in the divine counsels, if

¹ Romans viii. 29.² 2 Cor. iii. 18³ Colossians iii. 10.

not the *only* possible way, was the *best* and the *wisest* ; and, under this impression, we may contemplate the mystery of the Incarnation with feelings of wonder and thankfulness. Yet these feelings may well be deepened by the insight, which Divine Wisdom has vouchsafed to us, into the reasons and especial benefits of that economy. If we cannot penetrate into the first springs of that mystery, nor find any other cause for the pardoning love of God to sinful man, than in His general attribute of mercy, nor discover why His Eternal Son should Himself have undertaken the work of redemption ; yet surely it is cause of additional thankfulness, if He has permitted us to see the connexion between that resolve of mercy, and His coming in the flesh, and to trace all the collateral benefits which have resulted from it.

But there is still another reason of that mysterious necessity which caused the Son of God not to abhor the Virgin's womb, nor to shrink from the sharpness of death ; a reason which lies at the very root of the Christian faith. The Word was made flesh, and, after having dwelt amongst us, suffered in the flesh ; that He might assure us of the resurrection of the body. "*If Christ be not raised,*" argues St. Paul, "*your faith is vain ; ye are yet in your sins.—But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man*

“*came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*”¹ The same human body in which the Saviour tabernacled during His sojourn upon earth, rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and there in a glorified state still exists; for it is in His human nature that the Son of God has been exalted by the Father, to the throne of His mediatorial kingdom. And as His body, during His life, was like our natural body; so will our bodies, when risen again, be like His spiritual body; “*for there is a natural body,*” reasons St. Paul, “*and there is a spiritual body. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*”² “*Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.*”³

One further consideration only seems to be required, in order to give full force and effect to our belief in the Incarnation of our Lord; and that also is supplied in His written word. As

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 17, 20, 21, 22.

² Ibid. xv. 44, 47, 49.

³ Philippians iii. 20, 21.

He came once to visit us in great humility, in all the weakness and helplessness of human nature, clothed in a body which was subject to all the evils that the flesh is heir to, so will He come a second time in His glorified body, to judge us; for it is in His character of Son of man that He is invested with the awful dignity of Judge of all mankind. “*God hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.*”¹

Regarding the subject in these several points of view, we need not scruple to declare, in the words of that ancient confession of faith which is appointed to be read this day,² “It is necessary to everlasting salvation that we believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ;” and if we believe it with the heart, with which, and not with the understanding only, man believeth unto righteousness, we shall learn, and by God’s grace practise, the lessons which it is so eminently fitted to teach us, of humility, patience, and charity.

The Son of God unsphered Himself from His eternal glory, and appeared amongst men in the likeness of sinful flesh, in itself an astonishing act of self-humiliation and abasement: and not only

¹ Acts xvii. 31.

² This Sermon was written for Christmas Day.

so, but “*took upon Him the form of a servant,*” and submitted to the death of a malefactor. Can any believer in this mystery close his reason and conscience against the apostle’s inference, “*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus?*” And if He, “*though He was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich,*”¹ is it not an unanswerable reason, and so the same apostle urges it, for our charity (not according to the world’s standard, but after the example of Christ) towards those who are less abounding than ourselves in the comforts of this life?

As the habitual cultivation of these graces of humility, patience, and charity, is the method by which we may make the nearest approaches to a resemblance of our blessed Lord, so is the special exercise of them the most appropriate mode of celebrating His nativity. He came to visit us in great humility; let us visit *Him* in the persons of His poor disciples, whom He has constituted His representatives and proxies to receive the tribute of our love.

Let us also thankfully commemorate the mystery of His death, as the Son of Man atoning for the sins of men, by devoutly partaking the consecrated symbols of that body and blood which He took in the virgin’s womb, and offered up on the cross for our redemption. As the incarnation

¹ 2 Cor. viii. 9.

and atonement are the foundation doctrines of our faith, so is the sacrament which embodies them in visible emblems the characteristic and indispensable act of Christian worship ; a necessary evidence of our holding fast those truths, a right belief in which is necessary to salvation. Although we are made the children of God by adoption and grace, we need to be daily renewed by His Holy Spirit ; and of that renewal the sacrament, which is the communion of the body and blood of Christ, is an indispensable instrument and means.

It is not enough to have been grafted into the true vine by baptism, nor to have made a solemn acknowledgment of our relation to Christ : we must be continually seeking to draw fresh nourishment from the vine itself, for the maintaining and strengthening of our inner life, through the channels which He has himself appointed. He has taken upon Him our flesh, not only that He might die for us upon the cross, but also that He might be our spiritual food and sustenance in that holy sacrament, which, when we receive with a true penitent heart, and lively faith, we spiritually eat His flesh and drink His blood ; not literally, and in a carnal manner, as the Church of Rome teaches, an error emphatically condemned by our own, but in a spiritual sense, applying to ourselves, by the right use of the divinely appointed means, all the benefits which He has purchased for us by His precious bloodshedding.

Our blessed Lord, the Son of God, condescended to the necessity of being in all things made like unto us. Let us aspire to the possibility of being made spiritually like unto *Him*. How near an approach may be made to that likeness, by the promised help of His Spirit, none of his servants can tell till they have tried. But in none is it so complete, but that by more assiduous efforts, more earnest and persevering prayer, more patience, more self-denial, more careful study of God's word, more frequent communion with their Saviour at the table of His love, it may be rendered more perfect still.

Its final consummation will not take place in this imperfect state of being. The sinful flesh must always more or less weigh down the immortal spirit, and prevent men from being the express image of their Saviour. But it will be wrought out perfectly hereafter. Such will be the future glory of His faithful followers, such is the object of their present desires and endeavours. "*Beloved,*" says St. John, "*now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure.*"¹

¹ 1 St. John iii. 2, 3.

SERMON II.

OUR LORD'S HUMILIATION, AND ITS EXAMPLE.

PHILIPPIANS II. 5.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

THE inward illumination which took place in those who had been converted by the apostles, and received by the imposition of their hands the gifts of the Holy Ghost, was so great, and its efficacy in various ways so conspicuous, that in some of them it produced an improper feeling of pride and self-approbation. The Spirit of Evil can mingle the ingredients of temptation even in the cup of living waters which is taken by those who are athirst after righteousness. It was no wonder, if men, who had been suddenly filled with the gifts of the Spirit, and enabled, some of them to prophesy, others to work miracles, and all of them to apprehend the hope of salvation, should have compared themselves with others who were less highly favoured, and indulged a feeling of vain glory. Instances were not rare, in the first age of the Church, to prove that the

gifts of the Spirit, as the term is commonly understood, were not always accompanied with the *graces* of the Spirit, at least in their full measure. The former were bestowed upon certain persons, without their seeking: as being instruments, chosen and appointed by God, to build up the Church of Christ; the latter, which alone could assure them of their own personal salvation, were vouchsafed to those only who diligently sought for and improved them. St. Paul is very earnest in admonishing his converts to repress this sinful propensity to spiritual pride and emulation, and to think less, or rather not to think at all, of their own ability and success, but more of the exceeding goodness and free mercy of God. “*I say to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.*”¹ “*Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.*”² And to the Philippians he says, “*Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*”³ This precept he enforces by the most convincing of all arguments, the example of that Divine Master whose footsteps His disciples are to follow whithersoever He goeth, and who had declared to them, “*Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.*”⁴ The apostle

¹ Romans xii. 3.² Galatians v. 26.³ Philippians ii. 3.⁴ St. Matt. xx. 27.

tells them, that how great soever their superiority, whether in worldly advantages or in spiritual privileges, they were bound, as Christians, to demean themselves with humility and condescension towards others; with a spirit of self-abasement and renunciation as to themselves; after the pattern of the Son of God Himself, who practised a degree of self-humiliation and condescending goodness, which His followers must imitate but never can equal, in divesting Himself of glory; in taking upon Him the nature of man, and in suffering a shameful death upon the Cross. His purpose, as our Church instructs us, was twofold—to save and to teach; to be at once a propitiation to His Father, and a pattern to His followers.

The sum of practical religion is the imitation of Him who is its Author and Object. The most appropriate and acceptable service to God, is the shadowing out, however faintly, yet according to the measure of the powers He has given us, the lineaments of His own perfections. “*Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*”¹

A holy conformity with Him, in so far as it is attainable, should be the object of our prayers, and meditations, and endeavours in this life, and will be their result and recompense in the next. The effect of a pure and determined love is, to

¹ St. Matt. v. 48.

produce in him who is animated by it a gradual likening of his moral feelings and habits to those of its object. This is the surest, if not the only sufficient, proof of its sincerity. We cannot love where we do not approve and admire; we cannot admire without desiring to imitate. The apostle, therefore, had a right to say to those who professed to love their Saviour, "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*"

To be holy, even as He who had called them was holy; to be merciful, even as He was merciful, humble even as He was humble: these were the degrees of resemblance to be aimed at by all His followers; unattainable indeed in their full and exact proportions, but approachable, by successive stages of painful endeavour and hopeful growth in grace, giving at length an earnest and foreshadowing of that future state of spiritual completeness when we shall be like Him indeed; when we shall "*all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*"¹

But it is with a special reference to His humility, that St. Paul proposes to his converts the example of their Divine Master; and as the example is without parallel, so the language in which it is urged is very emphatic and significant. Indeed the humiliation of the Lord of

¹ Ephesians iv. 13.

Life was a subject to which no human pen, even under the guidance of Inspiration, could do justice; inasmuch as in degree it surpasses all human analogies, and in its mode all human comprehension. But as far as it lies within the province of language to describe, or of reason to apprehend that wonderful act of condescension, the words of St. Paul are singularly expressive. "*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus : who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men : and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*"¹

If I were desired to point out two passages in the Christian Scriptures, in which the divine nature of our blessed Lord is so distinctly asserted as to leave no room for the cavils of objectors, I should select the opening of St. John's Gospel, and the words which I have just read to you ; the testimony of the holy and amiable disciple whom Jesus loved, and who seems to have taken peculiar delight in setting forth the glory and excellency of his Lord ; and the attestation of that fervid mind, which once hated the name of Jesus with a deadly hate, and afterwards loved and honoured it with a corresponding depth and

¹ Philippians ii. 5—8.

ardour of affection. Of both these passages, we boldly affirm, that they who assert the simple humanity of Jesus Christ, have never been able to give any tolerable interpretation. In truth, they are not to be interpreted consistently with the acknowledged rules of language, so as not to imply His divine nature. The time will not be mispent which is devoted, with all humility and reverence, to a brief consideration of each particular phrase, in which St. Paul, writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sketches out the features of our Lord's humiliation: we shall then understand all the more clearly the extent of that grace, which He exhorts us to copy, according to the measure of our imperfect abilities.

In the first place, our Lord Jesus Christ was "*in the form of God.*" Taken by itself, this expression might be thought to imply nothing more than that resemblance to the Deity which is declared in the Scripture phrase, that man was created in the image of God. But here it is expressly contrasted with the words which follow: "*He took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.*" He who took upon Him the form of a servant must have borne some *other* form before, and that, St. Paul tells us, was the form of God; not any visible form, defined or circumscribed; nor do we pretend to explain it more particularly: on

such a subject human reason and human language fail us. It is evident that the apostle's meaning is that which he has nobly expressed in his Epistle to the Hebrews, where he speaks of the Son of God, "*the brightness of His glory, the express image of His person.*"¹ You will bear in mind, that he is instancing the humility and condescension of Jesus: but what condescension was there, in taking upon Him the form of a man, if He were not in a more exalted state of being before? But more than this: "*He thought it not robbery to be equal with God;*" or, as some interpret the original words, "did not eagerly grasp at the resemblance of God." If we adopt the common version, it declares that Jesus did not scruple to claim equality with the Eternal Father; if the latter, it is mentioned as a proof of His humility, that although He was in the form of God, before His incarnation, He did not eagerly retain that resemblance, but submitted to divest Himself of it,—"*made Himself of no reputation;*" or, as the words may be literally rendered, *He emptied Himself*, having taken the form of a slave, the lowest estate of suffering humanity, having been made in the likeness of men.—Of what did He empty Himself? Doubtless of His glory; that glory which He declared that He had with the Father before the world began. Instead of appearing in that splendour

¹ Hebrews i. 3.

which surrounds the King of kings and Lord of lords, and which might have been expected to dignify the advent of Him who was the “*chiefest among ten thousand,*”¹ and “*the desire of all nations,*”² He submitted to come upon earth in the likeness of sinful flesh, though Himself void of all stain or spot of sin, and to take up with the lowest condition of our mortal state as to outward circumstances and appearance; “*as a root out of a dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness;*” none of the external advantages which conciliate the world’s esteem and applause: “*when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.*”³ The Most Highest stooped to be the lowest of the low. His parentage was mean; His birth was in a stable; it was announced, not to kings and potentates, but to shepherds abiding in the field by night. And this self-abasement of the Lord of Creation was not imposed upon Him as a duty, but willingly undertaken from love for a perishing world. “*Forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.*”⁴ The Apostle to the Hebrews distinctly intimates that,

¹ Cant. v. 10.

² Haggai ii. 7.

³ Isaiah liii. 2, &c.

⁴ Hebrews ii. 14.

had it not pleased Him, He need not have descended so low in the scale of created intelligences. "*He took not on Him,*" thereby implying that He *might* have taken upon Him, "*the nature of angels,*"¹—and even *that* would have been an act of condescension, "*but the seed of Abraham.*"

"*Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*" Having divested Himself of His glory, and taken upon Him the nature of man, "not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God," He was to all appearance no more than man, and He set Himself to perform the duties of the inferior state upon which He had entered. His humility was suitable to His condition. He was obedient to the will of His Father, fulfilling to its utmost extent the prophetic words of David, "*Burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.*"² He was obedient to His heavenly Father, and to all His ordinances. He was obedient to His earthly parent, and to the constituted authorities of His country. His observance of the laws of God and man was complete and perfect. "*Thus,*" He said, "*it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.*"³ His compliance with human

¹ Hebrews ii. 16.

² Psalm xl. 6—8.

³ St. Matt. iii. 15.

laws was for example's sake ; but with respect to the will of God, obedience was His pleasure, and the very life-blood, as it were, of His moral nature : He declared of Himself, "*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.*"¹

He was obedient to that Will in all things during the whole of His life, until the moment of a foreseen and fearful death ; and to *that* also He submitted, as the last and surest test of His obedience ; and acquiesced in the decree which condemned Him to die the death of a slave. The original words mean literally, *He humbled Himself by becoming obedient*, an expression which could with no propriety be used of a person who was not by nature superior to the law which He condescended to obey. No obedience on the part of mankind, even had they continued in their first estate, could have been like the obedience of Jesus Christ. The moral quality of that obedience which is paid by the creature to his Creator, by the subject to his sovereign, is so different from that which the Son of God rendered to the Father, that although we cannot fathom the reasons, nor comprehend the methods, of that mysterious arrangement of divine justice, by which the obedience of one was to make many righteous, we need not wonder at it. We do not presume to explain the mode by which mercy and truth were

¹ St. John iv. 34.

reconciled, and righteousness and peace kissed each other. It was decreed from the beginning, in the counsels of the Triune Deity, that the Son of God should die for the sins of mankind. In obedience to that self-imposed necessity, He became incarnate, took upon Him our flesh, that He might suffer as a man the penalty due to the sins of men, and died upon the cross. "*Though He were a Son,*" says the apostle, "*yet learned He obedience by the things that He suffered.*"¹ That obedience was infinitely precious in the sight of God; *without* it, there would have been no forgiveness of sins. In *consequence* of it, forgiveness has been promised to all who seek to obtain it by the appointed means. We are therefore entitled to say, that this perfect obedience on the part of Christ was the price paid for the redemption of mankind: and that it was, at the least, equivalent to that obedience which all mankind would have paid had they never fallen from their first estate. "*Wherefore,*" says St. Paul—that is, in consequence of that consummate obedience, and in proof of its acceptance, "*God hath exalted Him, (the man Jesus), and hath given Him a name which is above every name, that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"² And so, "*we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned*

¹ Hebrews v. 8.² Philippians ii. 9. 11.

*“ with glory and honour ; that He by the grace of
“ God should taste death for every man.”*¹

This undoubtedly is the first duty of sinners who have been redeemed, that they should confess the Author of their redemption ; that they should acknowledge the glory of God the Father, in the work which has been wrought by God the Son ; and that they should embody their thankfulness in every outward demonstration of its depth and earnestness. If we do not endeavour to realize to ourselves, however imperfectly, the vastness of that sacrifice which Christ has made for us, we shall not appreciate the love which prompted it, nor the exceeding sinfulness of that sin which required it. But the vastness of that sacrifice is reduced to inconsiderable dimensions, unless we study, with admiration and gratitude, the degrees of that self-abasement, by which St. Paul has measured, as it were, the descent of the Son of God from the glory which He had with the Father, to the Virgin’s womb, the manger and the cross. The gracious offers of God in the Gospel will not be fully understood, nor convey to us that strong consolation, which the fainting soul of a conscious sinner longs to receive, unless we have a plenary assurance of the goodness of God, grounded upon the surpassing value of the gift He has already bestowed. The certainty of that removes all cause of doubt and fear ; for

¹ Hebrews ii. 9.

*“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”*¹ In proportion as you lower the exalted nature of the Redeemer, you weaken the authority of His gospel, and impair the sanctions of Christian morality; you undermine the foundations of faith, and loosen the anchor of the soul; you dilute the motives to gratitude, and chill the fervour of devotion; you remove the chief corner-stone, the grace, the spirit, the lustre, the strength of your religion. But if your views of the great mystery of godliness be clear and enlarged; if you admire and adore, with the implicitness and affection of a believing heart, which has been redeemed from the curse of its own corruption, and from the dread of eternal misery, by Him who was made man, that He might taste death for every man; and if this conviction be followed out in prayer, and self-communion, and meditation upon the wonders of redemption and the use of those means by which we hold a mystical communion with the glorified humanity of the Saviour, the natural result will be, that the same mind will be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. The branch, which abides in the true vine, is fed with the sap, and flourishes with a kindred verdure, and brings forth fruits germane in beauty and flavour. The soul which by faith and love is engrafted into Christ, is

¹ Romans viii. 32.

animated by the Spirit of Christ; for, as the apostle says, "*he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit,*"¹ and the fruits of the Spirit, in both, are the same in nature, though not in degrees of excellence, "*Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*"² These were exhibited in the utmost perfection, and put to proof of inconceivable hardness, in the person of our Great Example: these were the leading features of the mind which was in Christ Jesus, and the symptoms of which, in His weak and imperfect followers, are thus described by St. Paul: "*Be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*"³ But this precept of St. Paul holds good, not only of humility and benevolence, but of every grace and virtue, of everything that is lovely and of good report. "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.*" "*Forasmuch,*" says another apostle, "*as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind.*"⁴ I beseech you, brethren, to inquire, whether this be in any reasonable measure the case with yourselves. I

¹ 1 Corinthians vi. 17.² Galatians v. 22, 23.³ Philippians ii. 2, 3, 4.⁴ 1 St. Peter iv. 1.

beseech you to put the question to your own consciences individually, "Is the same mind in me which was in my blessed Saviour? Have I shown any decided symptoms of an identity, or a similarity, or even an affinity of motives and intentions and desires? Have I even so much as thought of that heavenly pattern in shaping my habits of mind or action? Have I ever aimed, with even a temporary and feeble endeavour, at that likemindedness and conformity with Christ, which is the perfection of the Christian character on earth, to be developed in fuller and fairer proportions in heaven?" Alas! what answer must the greater number of us give to these plain and searching questions? Is it not too true, that by far the greater number of those, who belong to Christ, as having been ingrafted into His Church, give no indication at all of that mind which was in *Him*, in Him, who has said to all that profess to come unto Him, "*I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you*"¹?

I would ask you to consider, with reference to your whole existence, its objects and duties, whether in a disciple of Jesus Christ the Christian character, that is, a resemblance to Christ Himself, ought not to be predominant. Let a man's station in the world be what it may, however important to the well-being of society, or

¹ St. John xiii. 15.

however humble and obscure, however arduous or engrossing its cares and duties ; still, can it be denied that there ought to be in him the mind which was also in Christ Jesus ? And how often is it so ? Look abroad into the political world, survey the more elevated walks of social life, observe the busy sons of commerce, the votaries of fashion ; where shall we recognise the reality of that portrait, which the hand of an apostle has sketched, of a truly Christian brotherhood, “ *Be likeminded, and of one accord* ” ? Is it not esteemed a proof of an independent and generous spirit, to fly off, in every variety of direction, from that common accord of sentiment which has for ages linked together the wisest and holiest of mankind ? Again, “ *Let nothing be done through strife.* ” Is not strife now held to be the very preservative principle of public virtue, and that which gives a zest to the discharge of public duty ? — and are not the annals of private life stained by the records of deadly feuds, and shameful violations of the law of love and holiness ? Can they who do such things be recognised as true disciples of Him who, “ *when He was reviled, reviled not again,* ” who “ *turned His back to the smiters,* ” and in the agonies of death prayed for his murderers ? Again, “ *In lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves.* ” Is this, or a spirit of arrogance, and presumption, and censoriousness, most

characteristic of our age?—Is there, in short, in the society of professing Christians, any thing like an embodying of the mind of Christ, a manifestation of the indwelling of His Spirit?

Again let me exhort you to try yourselves by this test. Embrace the opportunity of this solemn season,¹ when the Church commemorates the closing scene of her Lord's humiliation; when He, who had clothed Himself with our flesh, and made Himself heir to its weaknesses and trials, and that for our sakes, submitted to the last and sharpest of those trials to redeem us from the slavery of sin, and to purchase for us the means of being made like unto Himself.—Embrace this opportunity of inquiring into your own resemblance to Him, who was not only humble, and meek, and merciful, but "*holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.*"² See whether in any sense it can be truly said that your conversation is in Christ; whether such a Christian lustre shines about your path as makes it manifest, that "*the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.*"³

Consider also whether you are really actuated by an earnest desire to glorify Him, who humbled Himself for you; to adorn His doctrine, to extend His kingdom, to strengthen His Church, to bring all men to "*confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*"⁴ Can

¹ This Sermon was written for Palm Sunday and Good Friday.

² Hebrews vii. 26. ³ 1 St. Peter iv. 14. ⁴ Philippians ii. 11.

you truly say to Him, in the Church's words, "Day by day we magnify Thee"? Nor will it be unseasonable to put you in remembrance, that the mind which was in Christ Jesus, was not only a humble, condescending, patient, obedient mind, but a mind which prompted Him continually to works of love; He "*went about doing good.*"¹ Not only did He seek for that which was lost, and bring back sinners to the fold of God; but He pitied and relieved their bodily sufferings and infirmities, healed their diseases, supplied their wants. He had compassion on the multitude, not only because they were as sheep not having a shepherd, but because they fainted, divers of them having come from far. He not only taught but fed them. If there be one season of the Christian year which more than any other may remind us of the duty of self-renunciation, and of making some sacrifice of our worldly blessings for the good, whether temporal or spiritual, of those who have few of either, surely it is the present, when we thankfully commemorate that unimaginable condescension and self-denial which stretched the incarnate Son of God a willing victim on the altar of the Cross for our redemption.

Contemplate that amazing spectacle, gaze on the crown of thorns, the cruel mocking and scourging, the death-pain of the holy Sufferer, the blood and water streaming from His wounded

¹ Acts x. 38.

side : a sign of bodily death to Him, to us a fountain of eternal life, and then acknowledge all the force of the apostle's argument : "*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.*"¹

Let these thoughts be present to our minds, more especially when we celebrate these holy mysteries which are the appointed memorial of His humiliation and the pledges of His love ; and while, with a true penitent heart and lively faith, we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood, let it be our heart's earnest prayer, that through the grace of the Holy Spirit that mind may be in us which was also in Christ Jesus : that we may be like Him, earnest in the cause of men's salvation ; jealous for the honour of God ; abstinent from worldly pleasures ; that we may enjoy, in the luxury of doing good and the answer of a pure conscience, a foretaste of heavenly joys ; enduring the Cross of this world, and despising its shame ; pursuing a heavenward course in the strength of the Spirit ; refreshed by His ordinances, encouraged by His promises, nourished by His Word and Sacraments ; making daily approaches to a more perfect conformity with Him ; till we are meet for admission through His merits, into that blessed state where we "*shall be like Him, and shall see Him as He is.*"²

¹ 1 St. John iv. 11.

² Ibid. iii. 2.

SERMON III.

THE AGONY AN EVIDENCE OF CHRIST'S VICARIOUS
SUFFERING.

ST. MATTHEW XXVI. 38.

*Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful,
even unto death.*

WHAT a night was that, on which these words were uttered! Let us for a moment transport ourselves in imagination to the scene of which the sacred historian speaks. The city of Jerusalem lies before us. The throngs of worshippers assembled from all parts of the world, having eaten the Paschal supper with solemn words of commemoration, are retired to rest; except a few, perhaps, here and there, who are still conversing upon the remarkable Person, by whose solemn entry into Jerusalem, not long before, the whole city had been moved; and save that in the high priest's palace, there is a gathering of the scribes and elders at this unwonted hour, as of men waiting anxiously for intelligence of the completion of some dark

design, and the hurried march of a band of officers and men, with lanterns and torches and weapons, guided by a stranger along the road which winds across the valley of the brook Cedron. On the other side of the brook, in the darker shade of a garden, at the foot of Mount Olivet, are sitting in mournful silence, apparently worn out with anxiety and fatigue, three men in humble guise ; while a fourth, having just parted from them, with a look of deep dejection and anguish and amazement, is fallen on His face, and is striving earnestly and audibly in prayer, “ with strong crying and tears : ” the struggles of an agonized spirit putting all the energies of nature to the proof ; and His sweat, as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground. That Man of sorrows is the Saviour of the world ! The cup of His affliction is nearly full, He is about to put forth His hand and grasp it, and to drink it even to the dregs ; but it is a cup of deadly wine, and the bitterness of death is therein ; yea, and more, much more than the bitterness of death. For although the near approach of *such* a death as that which was preparing for the holy Sufferer, might well have drawn from Him that affecting exclamation, “ *My soul is exceeding sorrowful,* ” yet there must assuredly have been some ingredient in the chalice, which the hand of His Father then stretched out to Him, the thoughts of which were more appalling than the mere

dread of bodily dissolution, by whatever pangs it might be attended. Others have encountered the extremity of pain without shrinking, and have contemplated with a smile the instruments of torture, which were prepared for them; but the Saviour's agonies are such as were never felt by man. "*Behold and see, if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, where-with the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.*"¹ And that is the weight which bows down the holy Jesus to the ground, that is the bitter ingredient which forces from Him that earnest and thrice repeated prayer, "*O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*" It is the anger of God, awakened by the sins of a whole world, and about to demand their punishment, under the thoughts of which, even His own incarnate Son trembles, and is afflicted beyond human endurance.

No doubt there are other feelings which contribute to the fulness of that sorrow. The thoughts of a life spent in doing good and suffering evil in return; the treachery of a friend; the blindness and ingratitude of His countrymen; their approaching destruction; the partial success of Satan, in impeding the future progress of His religion; in short everything of sadness and vexation of spirit, which can be suggested to

¹ Lamentations i. 12.

Him, who knoweth all things by the thoughts of man's corruption and perverseness, thwarting the gracious purposes of God,—all this, and much more, which we, unholy and imperfect as we are, are utterly unable to conceive, are parts and features of those unknown¹ sufferings which weigh down the Saviour to the earth.

But these are not the whole; these, even in their extremest sharpness, do not alone constitute that trial of His spirit, which requires the intervention of an angel to strengthen Him. He, who has no sin of His own to awaken compunctious feelings for the past, or apprehensions for the future, is about to bend beneath the sins of the whole human race. “*The chastisement of our peace is upon Him : the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*”² He is to pass through the furnace of God's wrath, kindled by the first transgression, and heated to fierceness by four thousand years of disobedience. He is to suffer the penalty of all future ages of unbelief and ungodliness. His sorrow is to countervail the defective repentance of numberless generations of sinners; and to be equivalent to their just deserts. He is to suffer that evil, the fearfulness of which none but Himself who was in the bosom of His Father, could fully

¹ διὰ τῶν ἀγνώστων σου παθημάτων ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς Χριστέ.—Greek Liturgy.

² Isaiah liii.

know, the withdrawing, though but for a moment, of the light of God's countenance. Yes, my brethren, it is the burthen of *our* sins which has beaten down the blessed Jesus to the earth; *we* have added to the sharpness of that sorrow which is even unto death. Our corruption and unworthiness embitter those pangs which angels hasten to soothe, and call forth that prayer of anguish which breaks the mournful silence of Gethsemane! The scene which is there transacted it is of the utmost importance to us to understand as bearing upon the character of our blessed Saviour, and upon our belief as to His nature, and the object of His death. If He was no more than a holy man, a faithful servant of God, like one of the older prophets, then will this closing scene of His life be strangely inconsistent with all that had gone before. If He were merely a martyr, about to die in attestation of God's truth, the circumstances preceding and attending His death will admit of no satisfactory explanation. But if He was, as we believe Him to have been, a priest and a sacrifice, offering up His own body on the altar of the cross, as an expiation for the sins of mankind, with a perfect sense of the guilt of those sins, and of the displeasure of His heavenly Father; the whole transaction becomes intelligible and consistent, and in the highest degree affecting and instructive.

Let us examine this question a little more closely. It is certain that our blessed Lord had, from the very first, a distinct perception of the trials which awaited Him, and of all the sufferings which He would have to undergo, in the execution of His gracious purposes. It was, in fact, the foreknown extremity of those sufferings, which constituted the perfection of His obedience; the merit of which was to stand in stead of the righteousness of unrighteous man. *“ Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience, by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.”*¹ He took upon Him our flesh for the express purpose of suffering death upon the cross: He undertook the work of our salvation freely, and spontaneously, with an exact foreknowledge of the entire price to be paid. *“ Then, said I, Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Thy will, O God;”*² and the will of God was that He should suffer the extreme punishment of sin. He showed *“ unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”*³ He foresaw the precise mode of His death. *“ As*

¹ Hebrews v. 8, 9.² Ibid. x. 7.³ St. Matthew xvi. 21.

“*Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*”¹ No incident of His life came upon Him by surprise, nor found Him unprepared. He chose His own time for the consummation of His work; and far from shrinking back and desiring to postpone His fearful conflict with death, “*when the time was come,*” says St. Luke, that He “*should be received up, He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem*”²—Jerusalem, the stronghold of His enemies, the place appointed for His sacrifice. And yet we find, that as the hour of trial drew near, a view of His sufferings filled the mind of Jesus with the most oppressive feelings of apprehension and distress. “*I have a baptism to be baptized with: and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!*”³ And these feelings became more intense, as the end approached. “*The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified. Now is My soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour; but for this cause came I unto this hour.*”⁴ “*My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.*”⁵ Such were His anticipations of the woes to come. What they were in their reality, no

¹ St. John iii. 14, 15. ² St. Luke ix. 51. ³ St. Luke xii. 50.

⁴ St. John xii. 23, 27.

⁵ St. Matthew xxvi. 38, 39.

man can conceive; but when the sorrows of death compassed Him round about, and the pains of hell gat hold upon Him, bitter indeed must have been the anguish which forced from Him who had declared, "*I and my Father are one,*" that exclamation, "*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*"

How shall we account for this? Why was it, that Jesus, so remarkable for serenity and firmness, whom no opposition had deterred from the prosecution of His purpose, who had shunned no hardship, who had feared no threats, in the course of His ministry, who had long been looking forward to its terrible conclusion with a fixed determination of spirit, at last, when the storm was bursting upon Him, and when He saw the completion of His work at hand, should on a sudden exhibit so great a degree of alarm and despondency, and realize in His own person the words of the Psalmist—" *My heart is sore pained within me, and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me; and horror hath overwhelmed me.*"¹ It was not the ignominy of His doom which weighed down His spirit, for "*He endured the Cross,*" says St. Paul, "*despising the shame.*"² If the fear of death alone were heavy upon His soul, why should He have felt a degree of oppression, from which many have been exempt,

¹ Psalm lv. 4, 5.

² Hebrews xii. 2.

both before that time and since, who have had to encounter the king of terrors in his most fearful shape? Prophets and holy men under the old covenant, and martyrs and confessors under the new,—nay, even the weaker sex, strong in the power of faith, and borne up by the foreseen recompense of the reward,—have submitted, without a murmur, to all that the ingenuity of malice could devise, have laid down their bodies on the wheel, or stood amidst the fierceness of the scorching flame, with a smile of triumph and of hope. Yet none of all that glorious company was in possession of any motive to patient endurance, which was not present in fuller measure to the mind of Jesus. Sinless innocence, a life of perfect purity and active beneficence, the clear prospect of a speedy entrance into glory, exaltation to the right hand of God, supreme dominion and final victory—all these must have been present to His mind in the utmost clearness of assurance; and yet the trial was too much for His fortitude: for a moment He was overcome by the contemplation of it; and its reality was to the full as dreadful as His apprehension of it.

The death of Jesus then was not simply martyrdom; it was not merely His last attestation to the truth of His doctrines; it was not that He was called upon merely to suffer that, which thousands have endured without shrinking or

complaint. No : let the shades of Gethsemane bear witness to the truth ; let the horror-struck expression of that meek and placid countenance ; let the convulsions of that agonized frame, the strong crying, the tears, the bloody sweat, the ministering angel, the all but despairing exclamation from the Cross—let all these attest the truth, that Jesus endured the pangs, not merely of bodily death in His own person, but of the punishment laid upon Him by the Just Judge of mankind for the sins of a whole world. And if to the mysterious horrors of that passion must be added still further evidence, to prove that it was undergone for an object without parallel, beyond the course of nature, above the chain of consequences which result from human deeds or sufferings ; we hear the voice of God, speaking by the created instruments of His will, the preternatural darkness, the mighty earthquake, the rending of the vail, the confession of the centurion—“ *Truly this was the Son of God.*”

And are *these*, it may be asked, the proofs which you offer to us, by way of establishing the fact, that Jesus died upon the Cross for the sins of mankind ? Is it merely upon this collateral evidence, upon inferences drawn from particular incidents in the Gospel history that you build up so important a doctrine ? By no means. God be praised, that vital truth of our religion, that anchor of the soul, the propitia-

tory offering of Christ upon the Cross, that which constitutes Him our Saviour, our Redeemer, our Comforter, stands immovably upon other foundations than these; even upon the express words of the Great High Priest Himself, and of the Holy Spirit speaking by His chosen messengers. But the transactions of Gethsemane afford a striking illustration of the truth, that the Lord laid upon His Son the iniquity of us all; an illustration which, as far as the sacred historians are concerned, was manifestly undesigned, and therefore the more valuable. It was undesigned, because they do not point to the inference which may be drawn from their narrative; and if this be urged as a reason why the inference itself should not be drawn, we reply, that it is not the custom of the Evangelists to direct the attention of their readers to the conclusions which may be drawn from any part of their narratives. It was not the custom of our Lord Himself, nor, generally speaking, of His apostles. They speak with authority, and relate facts, and declare truths, and lay down precepts; and leave it to the common sense and conscience of mankind to draw therefrom the unavoidable inferences. What we have endeavoured to show is this, that the conflict of feeling which was awakened in the breast of our Holy Redeemer by the near approach of His passion, can only be accounted for, consistently with all that we know of His

character and life, by supposing that there was some mysterious and unparalleled cause of suffering, which aggravated this weight of His sorrow beyond the limits of human endurance, and made Him dread lest He should sink under the agony of being deserted by His Father; and what that cause was, we can be at no loss to conjecture, when the apostle declares of Christ, "*that His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree.*"¹

Supposing this explanation to be questionable, there is no question as to the actual sufferings of the blessed Jesus, nor as to their primary cause. His sorrow surpassed all other sorrow, His agony was real, His pains excruciating, His death one of lingering torture. And it was for our sins that He underwent all this. If man had been innocent, Christ had not died upon the Cross. Wherein, but in the sinfulness of man, amenable to the justice of a holy God, yet acting with mysterious restraint upon His mercy, consisted that necessity, which made the Son of God, from the manger to the Cross, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief? "*If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.*" But it is *not* possible: that is to say, it is not possible that it should pass away and man be saved. It was the desire of man's salvation, and a clear view of the only method of effecting it,—a method, originally of

¹ 1 St. Peter ii. 24.

His own choice and appointment, and by that appointment rendered now inevitable, — which prompted the Saviour to retract, when strengthened from above, the petition which the excess of His anguish had called forth; and to say, “*Nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done.*”

Does not this solemn and affecting part of the Gospel history, thus explained, open to us an awakening view, on the one hand, of the nature of sin, as it is contemplated by a just and holy God, and on the other, of the exceeding love and condescension of our blessed Redeemer? How perfect and intense a displeasure must that have been, on the part of the eternal Father, which laid so grievous a weight of pain and sorrow upon His holy and innocent Son! That He could, had it so pleased Him, have remitted the whole penalty due for the sins of mankind, without the payment of such a price as that which was the actual cost of their redemption, we presume not to deny. Nor do we presume to assign, nor even to conjecture, the reasons of that mysterious decree which went forth from the beginning, that satisfaction should be made by the blood of the Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world. But of this we are sure, that in no other way could the supreme Ruler and Judge of the world have more strongly marked His abhorrence of sin, or vindicated His own attribute of holiness, than by the sufferings and death of

His incarnate Son; and we shall fail to read the lesson which speaks so plainly and so touchingly to our reason and conscience in the concluding events of our Saviour's life, if we do not gather from them the strongest of all motives to abhor sin in its essence, and to shun it in its substance.

But if our eyes are not opened to a clear discernment of the justice of God asserted in the sufferings of Christ, we cannot close them against the gentler attribute of love, in the strength of which those sufferings were endured. And this should be the Christian's constraining motive, the secret of his resistance to sin in all its forms—the love of a crucified Saviour, who loved *him*, and gave Himself for him. “*Who His own self,*” says St. Peter, “*bare our sins in His own body on the tree: that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*”¹ “*The love of Christ,*” says St. Paul, “*constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.*”²

Endeavour to realize this feeling to yourselves. Imagine what would be your emotions, if, when

¹ 1 St. Peter ii. 24.

² 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

by the sentence of a righteous judge, you were upon the point of being consigned, if not to a painful and ignominious death, yet to perpetual imprisonment, or to hopeless banishment from all that is most dear to you, some virtuous and benevolent man, bound to you by no ties of gratitude or natural affection, were to interpose himself as a substitute, and at once to rescue you from your impending doom—not by earnest intercession and intreaty, not by his powerful influence with your judge, not by the surrender of his property, but by the voluntary sacrifice of his life, that sacrifice preceded by years of hardship and endurance, by the most bitter anguish of mind, the most exquisite tortures of body. Imagine this to happen, and think what would be your emotions of wonder and gratitude and love—what eagerness to honour the memory of such a benefactor, and to fulfil his known desires. And is not this the case with every one of us? No, it is but a faint resemblance of our case. No punishment, which the extremest vengeance of man can inflict, will bear a comparison with that of utter and endless exclusion from the presence of God. Nor is it merely an exemption from that dismal sentence which Christ has purchased for us by His death, but a title to an inheritance with the saints in light; not merely a deliverance from endless punishment, but the enjoyment of an everlasting recompense. Surely

then, whatever degree of admiration and thankfulness and love would be excited in us by such conduct on the part of an earthly benefactor, an equal degree, at least, ought to be awakened in our hearts by the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour Jesus Christ, thus dying for us. Look to yourselves, and see whether it be so in your own case. See whether your faith be indeed as clear and stedfast as its foundations are deep and immovable; your love as ardent and constraining, in proportion to your weaker intelligence and capacity, as that which moved the Son of God to take upon Him our nature, and to make it perfect through His own sufferings, and so to bring many sons to glory. Look at the death and passion of our great High Priest and Sacrifice upon the altar of the Cross, in connexion with that awful saying of St. Paul, that those who fall away from the faith which they have once embraced, and reject the heavenly gift which they have once tasted, "*crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame.*"¹ Consider whether some portion of the guilt, which the murderers of Jesus imprecated upon themselves and their children, may not be charged upon those who hold the truth in unrighteousness; who one day welcome Christ as a King, and the next disgrace

¹ Hebrews vi. 6.

Him by deliberate sin ; and even upon that crowd of His professed followers, who can look with coldness and indifference on the tragedy that was enacted in Golgotha, and not even smite their breasts with the more thoughtful of those who actually witnessed it, nor exclaim, with the believing centurion, “ *Truly this was the Son of God.*”

My brethren, pray earnestly with the apostles, “*Lord, increase our faith,*” especially you who are most in danger of its being weakened and made dull by your necessary engagements with the world, where Satan is ever active with his multiplied devices to keep out of men’s sight and mind Jesus Christ, and the things which are Jesus Christ’s. Lose no time in obtaining a clearer and more affecting view of what your Saviour has done and suffered for you. Turn your eyes from the vanities of a sinful world to Gethsemane and Calvary ; look upon Him whom *your* sins have pierced. Was ever sorrow like that sorrow ; was ever love like that love ? Then gaze upon the consecrated symbols of His body and blood, the pledges of His love, and the channels of His grace appointed for the express purpose of awakening you to a holy thankfulness and affection, and of maintaining your spiritual union with Christ. What kind of faith must his be, who can look, first at the sufferings of the Lord of life, and then at the memorials of His love,

and turn away unmoved ? How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ? O, my brethren, let us not be "*of them who draw back unto perdition ; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.*"¹

¹ Hebrews x. 39.

SERMON IV.

THE ATONEMENT THE FOUNDATION OF THE
GOSPEL.

1 CORINTHIANS XV. 3.

I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

THE words which are here rendered *first of all*,¹ are otherwise interpreted to mean, *amongst the chief things*, or doctrines of the Gospel. It is not very material which of these two senses we attach to the expression; for the truths which St. Paul had delivered to the Corinthians first in order of time, were no doubt considered by him to be first also in importance. They were the foundations, upon which the whole superstructure of Christianity was to be raised. The fact that Jesus Christ died for our sins, as it is the essential and vital truth of the Gospel revelation, occupies everywhere the first and most conspicuous place in the preaching of the great apostle, which he himself describes as being emphatically “*the preaching of the Cross.*”² So entirely

¹ ἐν πρώτοις.² 1 Cor. i. 18.

did the whole fabric of Gospel truth appear to him to rest upon this single foundation-stone, that he speaks of it as being the one needful and sufficient point of knowledge; the peculiar and characteristic glory and beauty of the Gospel; "*I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.*"¹ "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."² It may seem almost superfluous to adduce any other proof of this great doctrine than the words of Jesus Christ Himself, who declared that "*His blood was shed for the remission of sins,*"³ and that "*The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many.*"⁴ But it is important to see the place which it occupies in the teaching of the apostles, who did not themselves understand it in the lifetime of their Lord, this being one of the things which, as He said, "*they could not then bear,*" but who, when they were fully enlightened by that Holy Spirit whose office it was to "*lead them into all truth,*" and to bring all things to their remembrance which Jesus had said to them, placed this doctrine in the forefront of their teaching, and insisted upon it as the very vital and essential truth of the Gospel dispensation.

The hope, which was made sure and certain by the resurrection of Jesus, had its root in His

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 2.

² St. Matthew xxvi. 28.

² Galatians vi. 14.

⁴ St. Matthew xx. 28.

crucifixion ; for if He had not died for our sins, His rising again would not have established the fact of our justification. Life and immortality would indeed have been ascertained by that stupendous miracle : but it would have been, to the conscious sinner, a life of exclusion from the presence of God, and an immortality of woe. Whatever comfort is to be derived from the reflection, that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the earnest and assurance of our own, draws all its efficacy from the truth, that He died for our sins. It is only through this medium that the prospects of a life to come can be contemplated without fearful forebodings by sinful man. It is this consideration alone, which enables us to view the attributes of God with complacency and comfort, diffusing over them the soft and attractive hue of mercy.

Yet how many there are signed in baptism with that Cross which symbolises the doctrine and the promise of salvation, who never contemplate this leading truth of their religion, this keystone of their faith and hopes, at least with any reference to the interest which they themselves have in its certainty ; who entertain, perhaps, a general belief of the Gospel as a message sent from God, but have no intimate persuasion of that which constitutes it a message of peace and pardon and acceptance, the atonement made for the sins of all mankind, their own among the

rest, by the death of Jesus upon the Cross. Upon a clear understanding of that truth, upon a lively faith in the merits and efficacy of that death, depends our capacity to profit by the privileges we possess, as members of the mystical body of Christ, by all the ordinances of His Church, especially by that which embodies in visible symbols the great doctrine of the Atonement, and realizes our Lord's description of Himself, "*I am the bread of life.*" I propose briefly to show, that the sinner who hopes to be saved, as a believer in Christ, from God's righteous judgments, must build that hope, not upon any general belief in the being or attributes of God, not upon any vague persuasion of the divine mercy and forbearance, not upon any conviction of the historical truth of the Gospel, but simply and exclusively upon the Cross of Christ.

The sufferings and death of Jesus Christ are indeed most interesting and important subjects of inquiry and meditation, as evincing His perfect sincerity and devotedness, and proving His entire conviction of the truth of what He taught: they make it plain beyond contradiction that He was no deceiver : and we are by no means to lose sight of this consideration, in reviewing the benefits which have been derived to us from that wonderful instance of condescension and goodness. But if we go no further than this, if we

do not contemplate the blessed Jesus rather as a sacrifice than as a martyr, we shall stop very far short of the whole truth ; and our notions of that part of the Christian economy, which the apostle held to be of primary and vital importance, will be miserably defective and inadequate.

If the death of Jesus Christ were nothing more than His last and most conclusive attestation to the truth of His teaching, it was a mere historical fact, involving in itself, as apart from that teaching, no peculiar doctrine ; a fact of which St. Paul could not have been ignorant : yet he says that he “*received*” it, that is, by special revelation ; and the subject of that revelation was, not simply the fact that Christ died, but that He died for our sins. Again, had our blessed Lord submitted to a painful and ignominious death, only to establish His own veracity, and to set the seal of truth to the message of holiness which He had proclaimed, it might indeed have been said of Him, considering how deeply the best interests of mankind were involved in the belief of that message, that He laid down His life for the sake of mankind, for their instruction, for their improvement ; but in no intelligible sense of the words could it be said that He died for our sins, the particle “*for*” being, in the original, a word¹ which signifies *on account of* ; evidently implying, that as sin

¹ ὑπέρ.

caused the death of Christ, so the death of Christ was to be the cause of God's forgiving sin.

The expression, "*for our sins*," cannot reasonably be taken in other sense than this, *in expiation of our sins*; as in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "*Every high priest, taken from amongst men, is ordained for men, in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.*"¹ But the concluding words of the text are decisive, as to the sense in which Christ is declared by the apostle to have died for our sins. "*I delivered unto you that, which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures,*" that is, according to the prophecies concerning the Messiah, which are contained in the Jewish Scriptures. In those prophecies, then, we may expect to find, not merely a declaration that the Messiah, God's Anointed One, should die; but also some intimation of the manner in which his death should be connected with the sins of mankind. And such is, in fact, the character of those predictions. Had the writers of the New Testament been altogether silent as to the great object to be achieved by the voluntary death of Christ, the prophets of the Old would have furnished an explanation of that act of humiliation and mercy sufficient to calm our anxieties, and to animate our hopes,

¹ Hebrews v. 1.

and to make the Gospel dispensation appear in its true colours, as providing a complete and sovereign remedy for sin. That the prophets distinctly announced the connexion between the sufferings of Christ and the salvation of man, is a fact pointed out by St. Peter: "*of which salvation,*" he says, "*the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you ; searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.*"¹

In the great evangelical prophet more especially, the doctrine of the Atonement, and the expiatory nature of our Saviour's sufferings and death, are so clearly and unequivocally asserted, that we should have found, in his glorious foreshadowings of Gospel truth, a strong foundation for this vital doctrine, even if it had not been, as in fact it is, so interwoven with the entire tissue of apostolical teaching, that every attempt to separate it therefrom mutilates the Christian system, and leaves it disfigured with a hopeless inconsistency. "*Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows ; He was wounded for our transgressions ; He was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him ; and with His stripes we are healed.*

¹ 1 Peter i. 10, 11.

*"All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all—for the transgression of my people was He stricken."*¹

No Christian, it is presumed, will deny that this prophecy relates to the sufferings and death of the Messiah; and will any one, whether a Christian or not, deny that the sufferings therein described, are spoken of as vicarious and expiatory, undergone by one person in the stead of others, and for the purpose of redeeming them from the punishment due to their sins? What is the commentary of an apostle on this sublime and affecting prophecy? Hear the words of St. Peter:—"Christ also suffered for us—who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree; that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed."²

The prophet says, "*For the transgression of my people was He stricken,*" or, as the text seems anciently to have stood, "*was smitten unto death.*"³ The apostle's language to the Roman Christians is, "*He was delivered for our offences;*"⁴ and to the Galatians, "*He gave Himself for our sins.*"⁵ Again, Isaiah says, "*The chastisement of our peace was upon Him.*"

¹ Isaiah liii.

² 1 Peter ii. 21, 24.

³ For לִמּוֹ "to him," or "upon him," the LXX. read מִמּוֹ "to death," ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνομιῶν τοῦ λαοῦ μου ἤχθη εἰς θάνατον. See Lowth on this passage.

⁴ Romans iv. 25.

⁵ Galatians i. 4.

St. Paul tells the Ephesians, that “*now in Christ Jesus ye, who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ;—for He is our peace—having abolished in His flesh the enmity.*”¹ “*He went as a lamb to the “slaughter,”* is the prophetic description. “*Ye were redeemed,*” says St. Peter, “*with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*”² Were there any doubt as to the bearing of this prophecy upon the doctrine of satisfaction and atonement, it would be removed by the express prediction of the angel, solemnly delivered to Daniel, that Messiah should “*finish the transgression, and make an end of sins, and make reconciliation for iniquity.*”³

If, therefore, *Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures*, He died in expiation of those sins, to reconcile man to God. But the Scriptures of the Old Testament set forth the piacular nature of His sufferings and death not merely in express words, but by the imagery of types and shadows. It is to them more particularly that St. Paul refers, in a passage which I commend to your most serious and careful perusal, as completely establishing the doctrine of the Atonement; I mean the 9th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Under the law, offences committed in ignorance, or through inadvertence, might be expiated by certain appropriate sacrifices, called

¹ Ephes. ii. 13, 14, 15.² 1 Peter i. 19.³ Daniel ix. 24.

sin offerings or *trespass offerings*. But these sacrifices went no further than to procure a remission of temporal punishment; in consideration of them, God was pleased to withhold those immediate judgments which were denounced against the particular offences. But it was not possible that such offerings could, by any intrinsic worthiness of their own, make amends for sin, or propitiate the righteous Judge of mankind: that could only be effected by a sacrifice of a very different kind, of which they were merely the shadows. Yet they *were* the shadows, and therefore resembled the substance as to their outward lineaments, especially in one remarkable feature, the shedding of blood. “*Almost all things,*” reasons the apostle, “*are* “*by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary, that the patterns of things in the* “*heavens, (i.e. of things under a spiritual dispensation) should be purified with these; but the* “*heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices* “*than these. For Christ is not entered into the* “*holy places made with hands, which are the* “*figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now* “*to appear in the presence of God for us; nor* “*yet that He should offer Himself often, as the* “*High Priest entereth into the holy place every* “*year with blood of others: for then must He* “*often have suffered since the foundation of the*

*“ world ; but now once in the end of the world hath
“ He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of
“ Himself.”*¹

This then is the reasoning of an apostle :—As the expiatory sacrifices under the law, offered year by year continually, were effectual, by God’s gracious appointment, to procure remission of the temporal punishment due to offences under the Mosaic dispensation, and yet could never make the comers thereunto perfect ; so the sacrifice of Christ, and His precious blood-shedding upon the Cross, offered by Him once for all, and presented in the heavenly sanctuary, is effectual to the remission of those penalties which are, from the nature of eternal justice, due to the sins of all mankind, and for which the blood of bulls and of goats could never be taken as a commutation.

With such a testimony as this, we may well dispense with all further arguments to prove, first, that Christ died for our sins ; and secondly, that He died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

This is in truth the very point to which all Holy Scripture directly, or by connexion and implication, tends ; the centre to which all the lines of Christian verity converge ; Christ crucified to take away the sins of the world, according to the predetermined counsel of God, foreshadowed

¹ Hebrews ix. 22—26.

by His Holy Spirit in prophecies and types, and carried into effect by the unwilling agency of those who rejected and opposed it. If the death of Christ had not been a real sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of mankind, had it not effected an atonement, or reconciliation of man to God, the whole system of Scripture would have been deprived of its characteristic beauty, and enervated of its strength. The apparatus of prophecy, and type, and emblem, would have wanted its corresponding realities under the Gospel dispensation; and the revelations vouchsafed by the Holy Spirit of the nature of the divine attributes, the law of holiness, and the sinfulness of man, while they enhanced and magnified the glory of God, would but have deepened all the characters of that handwriting of ordinances which recorded the condemnation of His fallen creatures.

The Incarnation of our Lord—God manifest in the flesh—is the “*great mystery of godliness* ;” a mystery in itself, but the mystery of godliness only when viewed in connexion with its end, the death of an all-sufficient Mediator. His doctrines were the emanation of perfect wisdom, holiness, and love ; and they were invested by His life with all the persuasiveness of reality. The works which He wrought attested the truth of His declaration, that He was the Son of God ; and it was placed beyond all dispute by the most

wonderful of His miracles, His resurrection from the dead. Of the truth then of His religion, of its divine authority, of its obligation upon the consciences of men, I can entertain no doubt: but in what respect am I a gainer by the light which has thus been shed upon the will and purposes of God, by the sanction thus given to the perfect law of holiness, by the promise of reward and the prospect of immortality, if at the same time I am assured, of what my own reason and conscience also suggest to me, that obedience—complete, unvarying obedience—is not within my grasp; and that if it were, if it were possible for me to do all that God requires of me, I should still be an unprofitable servant, deserving no thanks nor recompense? What then have I to look for, knowing how infinitely short I fall of such a sinless, though profitless obedience; and compelled to acknowledge with shame and confusion of face, that my sins are more in number than the hairs of my head? A Gospel without an atonement might certainly contribute to my present ease and comfort, by regulating my desires and actions; and it would promote the peace of society, by inculcating the duty of forbearance and mutual love. But it would not remove the load of guilt which must lie upon me, in the sight of a just and holy God, although it might diminish the number of my actual transgressions.

It would not have power to soothe the pangs of remorse, nor to mitigate the horrors of the parting hour with a sure prospect of deliverance from the wrath to come. But admit the doctrine of the Atonement, and the Gospel at once appears, as it was described by the angels who heralded the birth of its Divine Author, to be not only glory to God in the highest, but peace upon earth ; peace between God and man,—Christ reconciling man unto God by the cross, *having slain the enmity thereby*. The Gospel is in every way the glory of God ; but it is from the Cross that His glory beams with a heating and reviving light. The brightness of His presence would be unapproachable and intolerable, were it not shrouded by the veil of suffering humanity in the person of the Incarnate Son, dying for the express purpose of bringing us nigh unto God ; “*for now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*”¹

I beseech you then to recollect—for the truth and availableness of your religious principles, the state of your soul in the sight of God, its prospects of eternal safety, all depend upon this conviction—that it is not by the revelations, nor by the precepts, nor by the promises of the Gospel, nor by the ordinances of the Church, as being in themselves efficacious means, that sinners are brought nigh unto God ; but by the

¹ Ephesians ii. 13.

blood of Christ; and by those precepts and promises and ordinances only in virtue of the efficacy which they derive from the shedding of that most precious blood. Upon that foundation rests the whole spiritual temple. It is the root of humility, the anchor of hope, the object of faith, the principle of sanctification, the key to all the treasures of God's mercy. Upon this ground then, as believers in the Gospel, we take our stand: if we recede from this, we relinquish that which holds the whole system together. If Christ died not for our sins, according to the Scriptures; if His death was not a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for our sins, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is vain. But if it was, then we have that assurance which alone can satisfy the desires, and appease the anxieties of a conscious sinner:—
“*We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*”¹

“Well,” it may be said, “we admit that the words of Scripture seem to favour your supposition; but it surpasses the grasp of our reason; we cannot understand it; it is a hard saying, who can bear it?” But what reason have you to expect that, in a revelation from God, nothing shall be proposed for your belief but that which

¹ 1 St. John ii. 1, 2.

you can comprehend? Undoubtedly you can comprehend the truth that Jesus Christ did die for our sins, although you may be wholly ignorant of the mode in which His propitiation was effectual, or of the reasons which led the Supreme Judge of mankind to appoint that wonderful method of reconciliation. The Scriptures not only propose to us the doctrine of a Divine Redeemer, but they expressly propose it as a mystery, a "*great mystery*;" thus peremptorily excluding it, as to its mode, from the legitimate province of reason; and classing it amongst "*the deep things of God*," which are to be believed simply and solely because He has revealed them to us. No doubt it would gratify the pride of man, and feed his curiosity, to be made acquainted with all the reasons of God's providence: especially with the secrets of redemption; those hidden springs of love and wisdom, which were in action before the world's foundations were laid. But there are some of the divine counsels, into which even the holy "*angels desire to look*;"¹ and this probably is one of them. The expiatory sacrifice of Christ, and the union of the divine and human natures, which made that expiation infinitely worthy, are not the only mysterious features of God's dealings with mankind. The moral state of man is a mystery throughout; a mystery, respecting which reason

¹ 1 Peter i. 12.

must be content with the light which revelation casts upon it; and even with that light it can only be viewed "*as through a glass, darkly.*"

What can be more mysterious than the origin of sin and evil in a world which was the work of a perfectly wise, and just, and holy God—a question upon which all the powers of human reason have been exerted without success; and which no man pretends to consider easy of comprehension? And if the origin of sin and evil be mysterious, what reason have we to conclude that its remedy shall not be so too?

The truth is, if you believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God, and apply to them the ordinary rules of interpretation, which is the proper work of reason,—nay, if you do not torture and disfigure them for the express purpose of getting rid of a mysterious doctrine, (and even then you cannot blot it out from the blessed Gospel,) you must perceive the word 'Atonement' written therein in characters of light.

Consult your own consciences; go down into the hidden chambers of imagery within; unravel the secrets of your hearts; see what they *are*, what they *ought* to be, and what of themselves they never *can* be; and you will *wish* this doctrine to be true. Embrace it cordially and with simplicity of belief, and with prayer for the increase of your faith, and you will *feel* it to be true: "*O wretched man that I am, who shall*

*“deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*¹

Once convinced of your own sinfulness and insufficiency, you will readily admit it to be “*a saying worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*”²

But then is not this an awful, as well as an acceptable saying? That our great Intercessor and Surety has put away sin, is indeed a joyful announcement; that He has done it by the sacrifice of Himself, is a subject of endless wonder and gratitude; that expiation could not otherwise be made, is a truth above all others calculated to exhibit the exceeding sinfulness of sin, its hatefulness in the sight of God. Let every one of us apply that truth to his own particular case, as a sinner, and say: If Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He died for mine among the rest. It was for *me* that He endured the contradiction of sinners, and the malice of His persecutors, and the agonies of grief, and the bitterness of death. It was my sin which bowed down His holy head with sorrow in Gethsemane, and pierced His hands and His feet on the accursed tree; yea, those very sins which I am from day to day committing, and by which, as far as in me lies, I render those sufferings of none effect. Can any consideration be more awful than this? Can we

¹ Romans vii. 24, 25.

² 1 Timothy i. 15.

imagine a more powerful dissuasive from sin? If it be less effectual with us than it ought to be, it is because we are not sufficiently alive to the twofold sense in which Jesus Christ died for our sins. He died to redeem us not only from the penalty of sin, but from its power, by opening a way for the Holy Spirit into the soul of man, to perfect the glory of God by the renewal of sinners to righteousness. "*Christ*," says St. Paul, "*hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us:*"¹ but the same apostle tells us that Jesus Christ "*gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.*"² But then a deep, heartfelt sense, not merely an historical belief, but a cordial and joyful acceptance of the truth, that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, will ensure our deliverance from its power: for it cannot be, that such a conviction should take possession of the soul, without inclining it to prayer, and meditation, and bending its affections and desires towards God. Still less can we conceive it to be possible, that any person should believe in his heart the vital doctrine of the Atonement, who neglects the ordinance appointed by the great Atoner for the express purpose of keeping alive the remembrance of that crowning act of love: "*Do this in remembrance of Me;*"

¹ Galatians iii. 13.² Ibid. i. 4.

of Me, not merely your master and instructor and friend; but of *Me*, your crucified Saviour. Let this solemn act remind you, not merely of My tabernacling in the flesh, of My teaching, of My miracles, but of My death; of My body broken, and My blood shed for the remission of your sins, and not of yours only, but of the sins of the whole world. Is it too harsh a condemnation to say that the neglect of the Lord's Supper is a practical denial of the Atonement, and that communion, without faith in that Atone-ment, is a solemn act of hypocrisy?

Blessed Jesu, Saviour of the world, can we behold Thee stretched upon the cross, enduring shame and agony for our sakes, shedding forth that precious blood with which Thou hast redeemed us unto God; supported under all Thy sufferings by the joy of saving us miserable sinners from eternal death; can we contemplate this spectacle, and yet contemn, or refuse, or receive with profane indifference not only the consecrated emblems of that body so broken, and of that blood so shed for our sins, but the grace which they would convey to our souls? Send forth Thy Spirit, we beseech Thee, to breathe into our souls those gracious influences by which we may realize the blessed fruits of Thy cross and passion; strengthening our faith, subduing our evil affections, inflaming our love, and animating our hopes with clearer prospects of that glorious

time, when we, who now surround the table of Thy love, shall stand around the throne of Thy majesty, and join in the triumphant hymn which shall then be raised by all the redeemed of the earth:—" *Worthy is the Lamb, that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.*" " *Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father, to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*"¹

¹ Revelation v. 12; i. 5, 6.

SERMON V.

THE ASCENDED REDEEMER'S OFFICE, AND THE HOLY
SPIRIT'S WORK.

ROMANS XV. 13.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

WHEN our Saviour, having conversed with His apostles forty days after His resurrection from the dead, was about to be translated from them into glory, He "*commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. For John truly baptized with water, but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.*"¹ He had before promised that after His departure to the Father He would send unto them the Comforter, who should guide them into all truth and abide with them for ever.

We can readily imagine the earnest expectation and anxiety with which these holy men

¹ Acts i. 4, 5.

awaited the fulfilment of their Master's promise, during the few days which elapsed between His Ascension from Bethany and the arrival of the day of Pentecost. That interval of anxious waiting, and looking for the expected Comforter, the Church commemorates and meditates upon, at the present season of the year; and directs the minds of her children to the most appropriate subjects for contemplation in that devout and earnest supplication, "O God, the King of Glory, "who hast exalted Thine only Son Jesus Christ "with great triumph unto Thy kingdom in heaven, "we beseech Thee, leave us not comfortless; "but send to us Thy Holy Ghost to comfort us, "and exalt us unto the same place whither our "Saviour Christ is gone before."¹ Let us consider the bearing of that promise of the Holy Ghost upon the Church's life and destinies, the necessity of its fulfilment, its continued and never ceasing accomplishment; in virtue of which I stand here, clothed with the authority of an ambassador of Christ, a messenger of God's truth, and by the efficacy of which alone my words can find their way to your consciences and affections, and do their proper work.

The Ascension of our blessed Lord is a very important article of Christian belief, not only as being the solemn entrance of our great High Priest into the Holy of Holies, with the all-

¹ Collect for the Sunday after Ascension Day.

sufficient atonement made for the sins of the whole world; but as a necessary preliminary to the mission of the Comforter, who was to supply His place to the Church upon earth, and to be the chief agent in its establishment and government. The importance and indispensableness of that mission could not be more emphatically declared than in the assurance which our blessed Lord gave to His sorrowing disciples, who could ill bear to contemplate the prospect of their Master's leaving them, helpless and desolate in the midst of a world which hated and despised them. "*Nevertheless, I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.*"¹

We shall entertain a very imperfect and inadequate notion of the office of our blessed Saviour, as a Mediator between God and man, as the Author and Finisher of our faith, if we look no farther than to the record of His holy life, the transcript of His wonderful preaching, and the history of His precious death and glorious resurrection. When He hung upon the Cross, and exclaimed, in words expressive at once of resignation and joy, "*It is finished,*" He meant that the painful struggle was ended; that the price was paid, that His victory over the prince of the power of this world was secured, though not

¹ St. John xvi. 7.

yet fully achieved ; but He certainly did *not* mean that every thing was completed in the economy of man's redemption, that He had finished His own enterprise as the Restorer of God's moral creation, and that the time was come, of which He had spoken, "*the time of the restitution of all things.*"¹ The sacrifice indeed was offered, and was about to be accepted ; but the great High Priest of the world had yet to enter into the presence of Him whom He had propitiated, and to be invested with that kingdom which He had purchased to Himself ; and to exercise the last but not least important function of His mediatorial office, that of making intercessions for us ; intercessions which in virtue of that sacrifice are prevailing and effectual.

But He had also promised to send the Comforter into the world, to supply the want of His own personal presence, to guide, strengthen, and sanctify those whom He had redeemed by His death, and who were to be the objects of His continued intercession.

It is most important that we should not close the volume of evangelical history, at the page which records the price paid for our redemption, and the triumph of the great Atoner over death and the grave ; that we should not merely go forth with Him to Bethany, and see Him in imagination taken up into heaven, and there lose

¹ Acts iii. 21.

sight of Him as of One who could no longer hold intercourse with His Church upon earth; but that we should habitually think of Him as seated on the throne of His glory, and exercising from that high eminence a constant superintendence and influence over every part of that universal dominion which He assumed upon His ascension, and which He will not resign, till He shall have put all enemies under His feet.

That the seat which the ascended Messiah was to occupy at the right hand of God was to be a throne, not only of glory, but also of dominion and power, was a feature of the Gospel dispensation clearly shadowed out by prophecy. "*I have set my king upon my holy hill of Sion.*"¹ "*Unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom.*"² To the Son of Man, said the prophet Daniel, "*there was given dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away; and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.*"³ God, says St. Paul, "*raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that*

¹ Psalm ii. 6.² Hebrews i. 8.³ Daniel vii. 14.

*“which is to come ; and hath put all things under
“His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all
“things to the Church, which is His body, the
“fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”*¹

The ascension of our blessed Lord, and His session at the right hand of the Father, was the commencement of that mediatorial kingdom of which all we are subjects, and in the government of which we have a not less direct and personal interest than we have in those wonderful events which preceded it. By the death and passion of Christ, He purchased for us remission of our sins ; by His resurrection, He assured us that the price had been accepted ; but He ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, in order that He might be the continual dispenser of grace and pardon to penitent believers ; God having, as St. Peter says, exalted Him with His *“right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give
“repentance to Israel and remission of sins.”*²

The pardon which has been purchased for all by the crucified Saviour, each individual sinner must obtain for himself from the glorified Mediator. From Him, as the Head of the Church, as the King, ruling over all, for the purposes of its purification and completion, are derived all the energies and influences, which the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, dispenses through various channels to those who

¹ Ephesians i. 20—23.

² Acts v. 31.

have been incorporated by baptism into that mystical body, for the sanctification of each member, and for the edification of the Church at large. "*When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men;*" and these gifts, St. Paul tells us, were, "*apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;*" and not only so; but "*unto every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*"¹

To Him, therefore, our ascended and glorified Saviour, let every member of His household look for a continual supply of all that is needful for his daily advances towards Christian perfectness. Let us seek to experience the reality of those gifts, which are freely dispensed by Him, who has the keys of heaven's treasury, through channels of His own appointment; nor let us question the abundance or the efficacy of that grace, which is bestowed by Him who sitteth at the right hand of God, full of compassion, and supreme in power. "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.*"²

¹ Ephesians iv. 8, 11, 12, 7.

² Ibid. i. 3, 4.

We see now the connexion and mutual relation of those two great events in the history of our holy religion,—the ascension of our blessed Lord, and the coming of the Holy Ghost; the one being a necessary preliminary to the other; the latter being indispensable to the continued government of that kingdom, of which the former was the solemn inauguration: the ascension introduced into the presence of the Father, and placed at the right hand of His majesty, our great Mediator and Intercessor. “*He is able,*” says the apostle, “*to save them to the uttermost, who come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.*”¹ “*It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.*”² He is continually pleading the merits of His own obedience, as countervailing all the demerits of those whom He has redeemed; and adding the incense of His own atoning sacrifice, a sweet-smelling savour unto God, to the prayers of His faithful servants, preferred in virtue of their relation to Him. He is described in the Revelation as the Angel who “*stood at the altar, having a golden censer: and there was given unto Him much incense, that He should offer it with the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne: and the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the*

¹ Hebrews vii. 25.² Romans viii. 34.

*“saints, ascended up before God, out of the angel’s hand.”*¹

What an encouragement to prayer is afforded by this view of the Redeemer’s mediatorial office! How infinitely consolatory to reflect, that we have, for a prevailing Intercessor with the Father, One who has experienced in His own person the wants and infirmities of our nature, and *“needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man.”*² As we should naturally look for a more touching and persuasive strain of eloquence from the lips of an advocate, who had himself struggled against the temptations which his client had been unable to resist; and as we should place a more implicit reliance upon the care and tenderness of a physician who had suffered, in his own person, the malady for which we seek relief; so surely it may inspire us with increased confidence in the willing love of our great Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, that great Healer of souls, to consider, that *“as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same;”* *“and was in all things made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people: for in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.”*³

¹ Rev. viii. 3, 4.

² St. John ii. 25.

³ Heb. ii. 14, 17, 18.

If then at any time we are oppressed and disheartened by the thought, that as the God, to whom our prayers are directed, is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; that we are unworthy, through our manifold sins, to offer unto Him any sacrifice, even the sacrifice of praise and prayer, "*the fruit of our lips*;" that the best oblations of our hearts are alloyed and tainted by natural corruption and actual sinfulness; we may take courage, not to continue in sin while we pray, but to pray though we are beset by sin, in the blessed assurance that our prayers are sanctified and made acceptable to God by the intercession of His dear Son; and so we may "*come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*"¹ And this is the second part of the benefit which results from the ascension of our Lord. He not only intercedes for us, but succours us; not only obtains mercy for us, as penitent sinners, but gives us grace to help us in that time of need, which will never cease to come upon us while we are members of the Church militant here on earth; the time of those struggles between the flesh and the spirit, which attest, in their sharpness, the power of the soul's adversary, but in their issue the triumph of saving grace.

It would not be enough, for the full accom-

¹ Hebrews iv. 16.

plishment of His purposes of mercy, were the Saviour to limit the exercise of His mediatorial office to acts of intercession. That indeed is the work which He does for us in heaven, in the presence chamber of the great King. But there is also a work to be done for us upon earth, even that work, which we are utterly unable to do for ourselves, whereby each of us individually realizes to himself the benefits of that redemption which Christ has wrought for all. Jesus Christ died to redeem us from eternal death; from the penalty due to every one of the descendants of the first Adam. In bar of the sentence which would condemn us to undergo that penalty, He pleads the merits of His own all-sufficient obedience, and continually intercedes for us as our Advocate, and the plea is admitted by the Father, whom He has pleased by His obedience, and whose justice has been fully satisfied by the death of the Immaculate Victim.

But then every one who is to profit by that plea, must possess the two qualifications of repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, issuing in a renewed heart and a holy life, and for this also that merciful Saviour has made due provision. He has not only prepared a marriage feast and made ample room for all the invited guests, that is, for all the human race, but has provided for all the wedding garment, wherewith every comer must be clothed.

He has not only redeemed us from death, but has purchased us unto Himself for a peculiar people, zealous of good works; and He makes us able, as well as zealous, to perform those works, by infusing into us, through certain appointed channels, that inward strength of which we stand in need.

But this second benefit of His mediatorial relation to us, He imparts to us by the Holy Spirit. It is by *Him* that He governs and protects and extends His kingdom upon earth, and dispenses gifts and favours to His subjects. That such was to be the economy of that kingdom, our Lord Himself had very plainly declared to His apostles:—" *When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak; and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you.*"¹

This distribution of offices between the glorified Saviour who reigns in heaven, and the sent Comforter, who moves up and down in the Church upon earth, and is the soul of that mystical body whereof Jesus Christ is the Head, is well

¹ St. John xvi. 13—15.

calculated, when rightly apprehended, to give a certain distinctness and force to our notions of that part of the economy of the great mystery of godliness, in which we ourselves have a more present and personal concern. But yet we are not to infer from this distinction that the Holy Ghost is essentially inferior to the Son. "There
 "is one Person of the Father, another of the
 "Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But
 "the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and
 "of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal,
 "the majesty co-eternal."

"If," says one of the Fathers, "the Holy Ghost
 "is described in Scripture as proceeding from
 "the Father; as setting at liberty; if He be the
 "Lord, and sanctifieth; if with the Father and
 "the Son He createth and giveth life; if He
 "have the same dignity with them; if He be
 "everywhere, and filleth all things; if He dwell
 "in the Elect, if He convinceth and judgeth the
 "world; if He be appealed to by the apostles as
 "the Author and Source of inspiration; if He be
 "the Comforter, the Regenerator, the Purifier of
 "men's souls; if to blaspheme Him be the sin
 "without forgiveness, then He must be God."¹

¹ "Si de Patre procedit Spiritus Sanctus, si liberat, si Dominus
 "est et sanctificat, si creat cum Patre et Filio et vivificat, si præ-
 "stantiam habet cum Patre et Filio, si ubique est et implet omnia,
 "si habitat in electis, si arguit mundum, si judicat, si bonus et
 "rectus est, si de Eo clamatur 'hæc dicit Spiritus Sanctus,' si
 "prophetas constituit, si apostolos mittit, si episcopos præficit, si

Search the Scriptures, and you will find Him there set forth as the Divine Inspirer of the prophets and apostles: the immediate Worker of those miracles by which the Gospel was proved and established, and which are the witness and testimony, the power and demonstration of the Spirit, that He is the Sanctifier of all hearts, the Distributor of all the gifts of God for the edification of His Church. We are commanded to embrace His testimony, to obey His good motions; to obtain His gifts and graces; to be careful not to grieve and drive Him from us, nor to "*do despite unto the Spirit of Grace*," which is represented as a more unpardonable sin than offending against the person of the Father Himself.

As St. Paul invokes a threefold benediction on the saints, "*the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all*,"¹ so He recognises the distinct offices which belong to the Three Divine Persons in the unity of the Godhead, in carrying on to its completion the plan of redemption:—"Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit, and there are differences of

"Consolator est, si cuncta dispensat prout vult, si abluit et justificat, si tentatores suos interfecit, si 'is qui Eum blasphemaverit' non habet remissionem neque in hoc seculo neque in futuro,' quod utique Deo proprium est: hæc cum ita sint, cur de Eo dubitatur quod Deus sit, cum Eum operum magnitudo quod est ipsa manifestat?"—EUGENIUS, *de Catholicâ Fide*.

¹ 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

*“administrations, but the same Lord: and there
“are diversities of operations; but it is the same
“God which worketh all in all.”*¹

Good reason then have we to join, every one for himself, in the Church's earnest prayer to God, that He will not leave us comfortless, now that our Saviour is gone into glory, and His bodily presence is no longer enjoyed by the Church, but that He will send His Holy Ghost to comfort us: that by Him we may have a right judgment in all things, that He may in all things direct and rule our hearts, that by His holy inspiration we may think those things that be good, and by His merciful guiding may perform the same. A participation in these promised gifts is the great benefit to which we become entitled by baptism. The very first step towards Christianity is to be taken in the strength of the Holy Spirit; for *“no man can say that Jesus is
“the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.”*² To realize that benefit sealed to us in baptism should be the aim of our continual prayers and endeavours, that being regenerate and made the children of God by adoption and grace, we may daily be renewed by His Holy Spirit: transformed by Him, even as the apostles were, from weak, timid, ignorant followers of Jesus, to strong, intrepid, enlightened, consistent Christians.

And is it indeed the case with the greater

¹ 1 Cor. xii. 4, 5, 6.

² Ibid. ver. 3.

number of those who have become entitled to these privileges, that they value them, and seek for their full enjoyment, as they deserve? Is it the case with ourselves? Do we make it a subject of daily meditation and prayer, to prepare our hearts for the promised indwelling of the Comforter, and to realize it by all the appointed means? Do we seek for Him with deep searchings and earnest longings of heart, that He will perform His proper work in our souls; that He will effectually make known to us the mysteries of salvation; that He will substantiate to us the truth of Christ and the riches of His grace; so that they may penetrate our inmost soul, and become vital, active principles, the sources of holiness and joy? Are we in any reasonable degree prepared to say with the apostle, "*Hereby we know that God abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us*"? ¹ Is it a subject of anxious self-inquiry with us, whether the seed, which was sown in our hearts at baptism, has been so watched, and tended, and refreshed by a careful husbandry of the soul, as to have brought forth the fruits of the Spirit, "*love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*"? ² Is this grace the chief object of our prayers, that for which we supplicate the Giver of all good with greater earnestness and perseverance than for any other object whatever,

¹ 1 St. John iii. 24.

² Galatians v. 22.

as for that which is essentially and eternally good, and without which we must remain spiritually dead? Are our desires for grace anything more than half-formed wishes, transient and inoperative emotions, instead of being, what surely they ought to be, ardent and earnest longings, "*groanings which cannot be uttered*," but felt in the very depths of a heart, stirred up by a sense of its own corruption, and wrought into an agony which cannot be calmed till the Spirit Himself descends upon the troubled waters and bids the tumult cease? Is it thus that we wait and long for the fulfilment of that promise of the Comforter, which was made not only to the apostles and first-born children of the Church, but to as many as the Lord our God should call; which only began to receive its accomplishment on the day of Pentecost, but will be in continued course of fulfilment, as long as there shall be an unbeliever to be convinced, a sinner to be converted, a heart to be purified? Is it thus that we wait for and endeavour to realize the presence of the Comforter; or are we not, on the contrary, doing much to grieve Him and drive Him away by our coldness and indifference, or, by worse offences still, unfitting ourselves to be the temples of the Holy Ghost?

This, with respect to ourselves individually, and to our personal interest in that promise. And with respect to the Church at large, is there

less reason for our praying unitedly and fervently that its Divine Head will not leave it comfortless, but send the Holy Ghost to comfort it? Has there ever been a time when His holy influences were more urgently needed to strengthen and cleanse the mystical body of Christ, to enlighten its members as to the real nature of their relation to that body, and of the duties resulting therefrom; to banish and drive away erroneous and strange doctrines opposed to that truth which the Holy Spirit has embodied in the Scriptures, whether in the shape of rationalism and ill-disguised infidelity, of superstition and formalism and will-worship, or of an uncharitable and intolerant fanaticism; to heal the miserable divisions which rend the seamless garments of the Saviour; and to make men worshippers and servants of God rather than of mammon.

Surely it is impossible to look around us, and to see what is going on both within and without the Church, without feeling our hearts stirred to prayer for a more abundant outpouring of the Spirit. Let us not only wait for the consolation of Israel, but do all in our power to accelerate His coming; for there can be no question, that in proportion to the extensive prevalence of individual prayerfulness and personal holiness and active charity, a more plentiful effusion of the Spirit may be looked for upon the Church at large. We may not, as some enthusiasts have

done, expect a second Pentecost; but we may pray and labour, singly and unitedly, and with the certainty of a proportionate measure of success, for those secret but powerful illapses of the Comforter, which will lessen the mass of ignorance and contract the sphere of evil, and reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; and bring fresh subjects to Christ, the heavenly King, and extend and purify His Church, and hasten the coming of that blessed time, of which, alas! at present so few symptoms are discernible, when the work of the Spirit shall be completed, and "*the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*"¹

¹ Habakkuk ii. 14.

SERMON VI.

THE WALK IN LIGHT.

1 ST. JOHN I. 7.

If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.

AMONGST the inspired interpreters of God's will, there can be, properly speaking, no comparison with respect to the authority or certainty with which they deliver to us the truths of revelation. All of them were instruments of the Holy Spirit, who preserved them from all error, guided them into all truth, brought to their remembrance all things which their Divine Master had said to them pertaining to the salvation of man, and enabled them to leave a faithful record of those sayings to the Christian Church. But there is no reason to suppose that inspiration went beyond this; that it constrained the apostles and evangelists to deliver mechanically that which was revealed to them, or which was brought to their remembrance; and dictated to them the very words in which they should clothe the

truths and doctrines of the Gospel. It was not necessary that this should be the case, either for the ends of certainty or clearness ; and therefore we may safely conclude that it was not so. On the contrary, it is not difficult to conceive, that some important advantages would result from leaving the inspired writers at liberty to express the facts and truths of revelation in their own words, as they themselves were struck and affected by them, and to impart to the unchangeable substance of Divine truth somewhat of the colouring of their own affections and habits of mind ; those affections and habits, however, being themselves the subject of the supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit. The variety of style and method arising from the absence of constraint in this respect, would add liveliness and interest both to the historical and doctrinal parts of their writings ; and would obviate that appearance of a preconcerted uniformity, which usually indicates a collusive understanding between the writers in whom it is found.

If this be admitted, we need not scruple to admit also, that in the writings of one apostle certain truths or doctrines are delivered with greater clearness, or pathos, or emphasis, than in those of another. Indeed, this is so obvious on the face of the apostolical records, that it is hardly necessary to point it out. What different shades and tints, though all of the same heavenly

colours, are given to some of the leading features of Gospel truth in the Epistles of St. Paul, St. James and St. John; no contrast indeed, nor opposition, but a great and pleasing variety, calculated to affect with different emotions different classes of readers, suited to all temperaments of mind and habits of thought, except those which are vitiated or hardened by some moral defect.

This being the case, we may expect to find in the writings of St. John some distinct traces of the peculiarities which marked his intellectual and moral character. And such is in fact the case. Both in his Gospel and Epistles we clearly discern the movements of that gentle and affectionate, yet warm and zealous disposition, that ardent love for his Saviour and his brethren, which seem to have secured to him so distinguished a place in the esteem and affection of his Heavenly Master, as to entitle him to the enviable appellation of the beloved disciple. And this peculiarity of his style as a writer, serves another very important purpose. It proves beyond contradiction that the Gospel of St. John and the Epistles of St. John, at all events his first General Epistle, are the productions of the same author: we find in both the same ideas, and those of the most elevated and spiritual character, expressed almost in the same words, yet not with such an identity as to afford any ground for suspecting that one is original, the

other the work of an imitator. It appears to me that where an inquirer after Scripture truth has been led to entertain any doubts of the great doctrines of a Divine Saviour effecting by his death the reconciliation of God to man, of the sinfulness of man, of the necessity of spiritual union with God in Christ, of holiness of life, purity of heart, and charity towards all men ; nothing would be more likely to remove that doubt, and to settle and stablish him in the faith, than to study carefully the writings of St. John, and to compare his record of the life and teaching of Jesus, with his practical enforcement of their consequences in his Epistles. They carry with them the most convincing evidence of their truth ; no person, I think, can pursue the comparison throughout, in a spirit of honest inquiry and dependence upon God, without feeling how completely that great apostle has attained the object which he had in view. “ *These things have I written unto you, that believe on the name of the Son of God ; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.*”¹ An instance of that identity of tissue or colouring, which may be expected in the productions of the same mind, when it is filled with a subject of overpowering interest and importance, occurs in the passage which I have chosen for my text ; indeed

¹ 1 St. John v. 13.

in the entire chapter from which it is taken. As the Gospel of St. John opens with a sublime declaration of the Word, and of His being the Life and Light of the world, so the Epistle commences with a description of "*that which was from the beginning, which,*" says St. John, "*we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life.*"¹ And as the Gospel declares Jesus to be "*the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,*"² and records the saying of Jesus Himself, "*I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life;*"³ and again, "*Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you; for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth;*"⁴ so the Epistle says, "*This, then, is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another; and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.*"⁵

In this Scripture the points which I propose to consider are these; firstly, that God is light;

¹ 1 St. John i. 1.

² Ibid. i. 9.

³ Ibid. viii. 12.

⁴ St. John xii. 35.

⁵ Ibid. i. 5—7.

secondly, that Christians have fellowship with Him; and lastly, that this fellowship implies a spiritual resemblance.

I need not employ many words to prove that "*God is light, and that in Him is no darkness at all.*" It is a self-evident truth, that the Creator must possess in Himself, or rather that His essence must consist in all the perfections which are contained in, or can be conceived by His creatures. "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*"¹ As He dwells in light unapproachable, so is He the Source of light; He called into existence by His word that subtle æther, whose pulses fill and perhaps move the numberless systems in which our own appears but as a speck; He gave being to that still more subtle essence, which animates and agitates the living part of His creation, with ascending degrees of activity and purity, from the obscure but unfailing developments of instinct in the brute creation, to the unclouded intellect and comprehensive glance of the seraph who stands near the fountain itself of light, and exhibits, while he imbibes, somewhat of the brightness of its glory.

As God gave to the body the natural eye, through which the rays of light transmit those

¹ St. James i. 17.

images which furnish us with our knowledge of the material world without, so has He enabled the soul to discern by the eye of reason all the wonders of the intellectual world, and to contemplate both in His works and Word the great Original Himself. But this inward light, with whatever degree of brightness it may have shone, when it was first kindled by the Spirit of God in the soul of man, was dimmed and obscured by sin, and required the energies of creative powers again to interpose, to renew it and keep it alive. And it is chiefly with reference to this renewal that we are to contemplate God as the Light of man, revealing to him, not by doubtful inference and uncertain conclusions of reason, but by direct communication, such a knowledge of His own nature and will, as may supply the defects of man's natural light, and make clear his path to glory. But more especially, as He has revealed Himself finally in the Person of His incarnate Son, may it be said with truth by the Christian, that God is light. The Word "*was life; and the life was the light of men.*"¹ He was "*a light to lighten the Gentiles.*" "*I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me, should not abide in darkness.*"² O that we may have grace to walk by that glorious light, and to rejoice in its beams; to take heed to it as the only sure and certain light by which we can read

¹ St. John i. 4.² Ibid. xii. 46.

the lessons of holiness and hope, not clearly to be discerned by our own reason, but traced as with a sunbeam in the records of His life and teaching.

But God is also light, as he illuminates us by His Holy Spirit. He alone conveys into each believer's soul the beams which are shed by the Sun of righteousness over the moral world at large; forcing a way through the intervening mists of pride, and prejudice, and passion. Without this transmissive energy of the Spirit, the individual man remains dark in the meridian light. "*The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.*"¹

But this divine light is imparted to mankind through the medium and by the agency of certain appointed means and instruments. Our blessed Lord emphatically declared *Himself* to be the Light of the world; and yet He said not less emphatically to His apostles, "*Ye are the light of the world.*"² But it is manifest that by this expression He intended to designate them and their successors in the ministry, as the agents by which the light of His Gospel was to be diffused throughout the world; lights indeed they were to be, but shining with a borrowed lustre, derived from the centre and sun of that newly developed system of truth and love which was then made visible to man. Our Saviour's

¹ St. John i. 5.

² St. Matt. v. 14.

words, "*As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world,*"¹ implied that after His departure there should be another light; and that light was to be the Holy Spirit, and in a secondary sense the Church; in which the Spirit puts forth His enlightening influences by means of the Word of truth and the sacraments of grace. The Son of God is described in the Apocalypse as "*He that holdeth the seven stars in His right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;*" and "*the seven stars,*" we are told, "*are the angels,*" or bishops "*of the seven Churches*" in Asia, "*and the seven candlesticks are the seven Churches.*"² When our Saviour said, "*Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house,*"³ we may understand Him as alluding to His Church, in which His ministers are set for the purpose of enlightening the world. The golden candlestick is the Church; the light is that of Christ Himself, "*the bright morning star,*" transmitted to us through His Word; and they who are to tend it, and to light their lamps at its never dying flame, and to bear them forth into the darkness of the outer world, are His commissioned servants, the ambassadors of His love, and the interpreters of His law. What a sublime idea does this convey to us of the

¹ St. John ix. 5.² Rev. ii. 1; i. 20.³ St. Matt. v. 15.

office and work of the Christian ministry ; and how clearly does it point out the nature of that duty, to which they who bear a part in it are chiefly to apply themselves. But at the same time, in how striking a point of view does it place their responsibility, seeing that it depends principally upon them, whether the world be savingly enlightened or not. For if they fail to perform the work and suffer the light to be concealed, or substitute a false light for the true, there is no other appointed method for its accomplishment. “ *If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.*”¹

We then, who have been duly set apart for the work of the ministry, may apply to ourselves the designation, and remember the caution given by him, who under His Heavenly Master was the great example of ministerial faithfulness. “ *Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.*”² To enlighten a benighted world, to call men out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel, and to turn them from the power of Satan unto God, is the end for which the Church was founded, and the ministry commissioned. The methods of illumination are various, comprising all the processes appointed by God Himself, or

¹ St. Matt. vi, 23.

² 1 Cor. iv. 1, 2.

instituted by the Church, acting with delegated authority under the superintendence of the Spirit, for imparting knowledge, and making it effectual to its ends. The reading and preaching of God's Word, the dispensing of His Holy Sacraments, the rites of public worship,—all these are parts and features of the work. We conclude then, that they who would certainly and securely walk in the light, must walk in the Church: and so walking they will realize the apostle's promise, and have fellowship with God, and with one another. For that this is the meaning of the words, "*fellowship with one another*," is clear from the preceding verse, "*If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*"¹

But then none can be truly said to walk in the Church, who do not avail themselves with earnestness and diligence of all the means of illumination which the Church affords. If from a presumptuous conceit of their own strength, or discernment, or power of resistance, they choose, though outwardly the Church's children, to follow their own methods of learning and doing the will of God, and disparage and condemn those which are of His own ordaining; or, if through carelessness and worldly-mindedness they neglect them altogether, or use them only casually and cursorily, and without an earnest

¹ St. John i. 6.

desire to experience their enlightening and purifying efficacy, and so prove themselves unthrifty, unprofitable, unimproving children of our spiritual Mother; they cannot be said in any sense to walk in the true light, nor will they have fellowship with their Divine Head, nor with the saints. Hear the prophet's encouragement to the humble and diligent, and his warning to the self-trusting or negligent servants of God.

*"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of His servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God. Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand: ye shall lie down in sorrow."*¹

This is surely a most important question, which none may pass by or elude. Have we fellowship with Christ and with one another? with the Head and with the members of the body mystical? We profess to believe in a communion of saints; is it anything more than a name to us? Is it a sensible reality? Do we *feel* its existence, and experience any degrees of its blessedness? There is an external and visible communion, and there is an inward and spiritual communion; the one instrumental to the other; the one being

¹ Isaiah l. 10, 11.

synonymous with the holy fellowship into which we are admitted by baptism; the other with that spiritual union with the Saviour, and with the Church of the first-born in heaven, to which we are brought by the gradual renewal of the Divine image in our souls, through the operation of grace:—Christ formed within us, as St. Paul expresses it,—whereby, as St. Peter says, we are made “*partakers of the Divine nature.*”¹ When we repeat that sentence of the creed, “the communion of saints,” (which was added to the earliest professions of faith, by way of explaining the great object to be answered by the Holy Catholic Church,) it would be well if it reminded us of our own personal title to that holy fellowship, and of the degree in which we are fulfilling, in our own persons, its rules, and exemplifying its blessed features, by holding the same heavenly truth, performing the same common devotions, discharging the offices of mutual piety with and for one another, bearing one another’s burthens, promoting each other’s spiritual good, and all seeking as a common object the glory of God. This it is to have fellowship with Him and with one another; and this it is to resemble Him in those attributes which have been brought within the scope of our understanding and imitation, as embodied in the person of the Man Jesus, the glories of His Divine nature being softened

¹ 2 St. Peter i. 4.

and made accessible, through the veil of His humanity. It is in this sense only that we can "*walk in the light, even as He is in the light,*" and realize that mysterious promise of our Lord, "*If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him; and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.*"¹

It is manifestly impossible that we can have fellowship with Christ, if we do not continually endeavour to resemble Him more and more, in affections and intention. "*Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,*"² is a precept which has an especial reference to the evangelical grace of humility; but the same endeavour at resemblance is required as to patience, meekness, purity, self-denial, charity, and habitual piety to God. This resemblance to Christ, "*the first-born among many brethren,*" should be a constant object of our prayers and meditations. It has been a method of improvement followed by some pious men, to propose to themselves for a model some eminent servant of God, and to shadow out the lineaments of his character in their own lives and conversations. The Church instructs us to thank God for those of His servants who have departed this life in His faith and fear, and to pray for grace, so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of His heavenly kingdom. We know

¹ St. John xiv. 23.

² Philippians ii. 5.

how this practice has been perverted to the ends of superstition, if not of idolatry, in the Church of Rome ; and it is surely the resource of ignorance or weakness to propose to ourselves a less perfect exemplar, when we have one before us complete and finished in all its parts. There can be no danger of mistake or excess in a faithful endeavour to copy the perfections of Him who *“left us an example that we should follow His steps : who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.”*¹ To bring ourselves, or rather to seek that we may be brought by grace to a closer resemblance of Him, should be the aim of our daily prayers, and thoughts, and desires. To *“walk in the light, even as He is in the light,”* is a consummation to be achieved with reference to our inferior discernment and capacity here, and in its highest degrees hereafter, when those whom God *“did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son,”*² shall receive *“a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”* *“Beloved,”* says St. John, *“now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him as He is.”*³ We shall be like Him in purity and holiness ; like Him even in glory : in some degrees of that fulness of glory in which He sitteth at the right hand of the Father, on

¹ 1 St. Peter ii. 21, 22.² Romans viii. 29.³ St. John iii. 2.

a throne, which He will share with His faithful followers, victorious over the world.

But let no man expect to undergo that glorious transfiguration, who is not even in this life "*transformed by the renewing of his mind,*" putting "*on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*"¹ The new creation of the inner man takes place in this world; his spiritual life must have its infancy and stages of progressive increase here, to be fit for its maturity and perfection in heaven. They who have been once regenerated by the Holy Spirit in baptism, must seek daily to be renewed by Him in the inner man. The spark then kindled must be carefully tended and cherished, and fanned into a bright and glowing flame by the breath of the Spirit, in His word and ordinances and secret impulses. The light, in which the servants of God must walk in their passage through the world's darkness and delusions, is an emanation of that ineffable brightness, which surrounds the throne of the Eternal, and shines forth in the Person of His glorified Son. The soul which has never been accustomed to contemplate and rejoice in it here, will not be prepared to dwell in it hereafter.

If now we be asked, What is it to walk in the light? we answer, It is more than we can describe, and more than those who are walking in

¹ Romans xii. 2; Eph. iv. 24.]

darkness can comprehend. It must be experienced, to be understood; and even they who have planted their footsteps in the right path, and are seeking after knowledge and holiness, cannot conceive, at the outset of their journey, the brightness of that light which will be shed upon them in their upward progress; for this "*path of the just is as the shining light,*" which in the early morning but faintly streaks the eastern sky; but then "*shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*"

If, dear brethren, you are really desirous of knowing what is meant by walking in the light even as He is in the light, make but a faithful trial of the means appointed for your help and guidance, and God will open the eyes of your understanding to discern it. He will show you the path of life. But without a determined and continued effort on your own parts to advance day by day in the knowledge of God's truth, and in the practice of holiness and charity, it will be vain for us to speak, and you to hear of the blessedness of those who walk in the light, and have fellowship with Christ.

But there is one practical test of your having in some measure attained that blessedness; or which at least, if you are wanting therein, will show that you are still in darkness. "*He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother,*" declares St. John, "*is in darkness even until now.*"

*“He that loveth his brother abideth in the light,
“and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.
“But he that hateth his brother is in darkness,
“and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not
“whither he goeth, because that darkness hath
“blinded his eyes.”*¹ I need not tell you that in the language of our Lord and His apostles, to hate one's brother means not to love him, and that to love him less than we ought, is to love him less than ourselves. Assure yourselves, therefore, that so long as you are wanting in charity, you will be wanting in spiritual light. We must love God, before we can know Him as we ought; and *“he who loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”*²

I would then desire you seriously to consider whether the reluctant and scanty contributions which are given by the richer members of Christ's Church, to the promotion of objects most important to the glory of God and the good of their brethren, for the extension of His kingdom upon earth, for the removal of ignorance, for the relief of bodily suffering and want, can be regarded as evidences of their walking in the light, of their fellowship with Christ and with the saints. Do they clearly recognise God as the Giver and Owner of all that they have, and His Church as the household in which they

¹ 1 St. John ii, 9—11.

² Ibid. iv. 20.

are to dispense it, and His servants as their brethren in Christ, entitled, as members of the same family, and as His representatives, to a participation in their worldly means, the degrees of which are to be measured by the need which requires it, compared with the amount which it is in their power to give? Be persuaded of this, brethren, that religion is a very practical thing; its root, indeed, is in faith; and it shines in the soul by the light of truth; but what it requires of us is, not merely to believe in the light, but to walk in it; not only to know God, but to have fellowship with Him; not merely to praise Him with our lips, but to deny ourselves for His glory; and for that end to maintain communion as of faith and worship, so of charity and beneficence with His saints. These are the realities of Christian light and love; these constitute our likeness to the Divine Original; these are the only sure evidences of our having put on Christ. “*The end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*”¹ If such be our fellowship of light and love with our Father in Heaven, and our brethren on earth, then “*the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.*”

¹ 1 Timothy i. 5.

SERMON VII.

THE FEAR OF GOD.

1 ST. PETER I. 17.

If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

THE persons to whom this Epistle is addressed are described by the apostle as being “*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ,*”¹ a brief but most expressive summary of the grand features of that wonderful plan of mercy, by which sinful man is reconciled to God.

“*Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world.*”² It was everlastingly decreed by Him, that the Gospel should be preached to all nations; in what order, and at what periods, and by whom it was to be accepted, and by whom rejected. And as the whole scheme of His providential government depended of necessity upon His sovereign will, so all its move-

¹ 1 St. Peter i. 2.² Acts xv. 18.

ments and workings, not only in their grander features, but in all their minutest details, as far as we are able to reason on such subjects, must be in agreement with His eternal purposes, and therefore must have been predetermined by Him. Certain it is, that neither nations nor individuals can receive the Gospel, but that God must have foreknown it; that in either case it is an inestimable privilege and distinction freely conferred upon them by Him in whose hands they are; and that therefore all Christians, who are so in spirit, as well as by name, are “*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*” The ends of this election are twofold: holiness here, and happiness hereafter; an enfranchisement from the captivity of sin, both as to its present power and its future penalties. And these are accomplished in the believer, the first, by the purifying influences of the Holy Spirit; the second, by the atonement made for him by a crucified Saviour; the latter of which is only rendered effectual to him by the former; for as it is the peculiar disclosure of the Gospel, that “*no man cometh unto the Father but by Jesus Christ,*”¹ so it is an eternal truth, implied in the very notion of religion, that “*without holiness no man shall see the Lord.*”² Christians, therefore, are completely described, as to their privileges, their personal character, and their hopes, as

¹ St. John xiv. 6.

² Hebrews xii. 14.

being "*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.*" In this election, with reference to the purposes of God, the methods by which it is perfected, and the tokens by which it is made known, there is nothing which is calculated to engender presumption or carelessness; nor to exempt the Christian from the salutary influence of a holy fear. On the contrary, there is much to awaken and excite, as well as to encourage and console him, in the reflection that every spiritual privilege carries with it a corresponding obligation; and that the responsibility of the Christian vocation is at least in proportion to its dignity. If God is become our Father, in a dearer and more intimate sense than merely as our Creator, all the duties of sonship are thereby bound upon us with a more sacred and constraining force; if we are endowed with capacities which by nature we have not inherited, it is that we may do things which by nature we could not have done. If we are made God's peculiar people, we are bound to display a peculiarity of godliness; and the fear of falling short in these respects, of not bringing forth fruits answerable to the seed which has been sown, and to the culture which has been bestowed upon it by the Divine husbandman, is sufficient to repress that exultation which otherwise might be excited by

the certainty of our adoption into the family of God, and of our near access to Him by the Spirit, through the merits of His dear Son. Such is the purport of the apostle's reasoning in the text: "*If ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*" If ye call God your Father, in virtue of that covenant into which you have entered with Him, the very term of relationship implies the sacredness of your obligations to filial obedience and love. He is "*no respecter of persons,*" nor will the circumstance of your election into His own peculiar family by His free grace and mercy, if it be not realized in its proper results of holiness, serve to any other purpose than that of deepening the complexion of your sinfulness. If therefore ye call upon Him with a due sense of what He will certainly expect from you as his children, "*pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*"

It is manifest that the apostle proceeds upon the supposition that an election into the family of God through Christ, although it confers those inestimable and peculiar privileges, without which we can neither do things pleasing to God, nor escape from the curse of sin, does not infallibly ascertain either the present holiness or the final salvation of the elect. The same apostle, in his second Epistle, expressly declares, that a Christian may have been "*purged from his old*

“*sins,*”¹ and yet forget that he is so cleansed, and be found wanting in diligence, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, and charity; he may be “*blind, and not able to see afar off;*” he may lose his spiritual discernment of the things which concern his peace. “*Wherefore the rather,*” concludes the apostle, (and why should he so conclude, if the object of his exhortation had been already obtained?) “*wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure.*” An exhortation perfectly equivalent to the caution given to the elect in the words of the text:—“*If ye call on the Father, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*”

At the same time it must be remembered, that a true Christian fear of God is not a servile nor a painful affection of the mind. It is indeed incompatible with that confidence of perfect security, which almost unavoidably engenders presumption or carelessness; but not with that comfortable assurance of the soul, which leads it to repose upon the absolute sufficiency of its Saviour, the certain promises of grace, and the validity of that covenant which will never be departed from by God, if it be not broken by His servants. The word used by the apostle is one which implies more of reverence than of dread. A person may be, and ought to be afraid

¹ 2 St. Peter i. 9, 10.

of injuring or offending his parent, his benefactor, his friend; not because he fears his resentment or dreads any evil results to himself, but because he feels a natural and involuntary horror at the thought of conduct which is so contrary to the tenour of his affections, and an unwillingness to inflict pain upon one whose happiness he desires. This kind of fear is intimately connected with love. It is a sensitive and zealous reverence, such as subjects feel towards a just and benevolent sovereign, and dutiful children to a parent. Not that the fear of God, as an avenger of evil, is to be altogether shaken off, were it possible, which indeed it is not. The mind of man cannot divest itself of a secret impression, that there is at all times an invisible Witness of his thoughts. Those persons who are most religious, are most alive to the presence of this Omniscient Inspector; and no deviation from the right path is made, without a sentiment, however momentary, of fear, excited by the thought that we have offended *Him*, who will take account of our actions. This fear, in the case of those who are not hardened and habitual sinners, leads the way to repentance, and speedily gives place to more generous sentiments, more effectual restraints. Nor is it to be quenched or subdued; but the causes of it are to be avoided. So that the right fear of God, that fear which is perfectly consistent with the love of *Him*, and with an implicit reliance upon

His mercy, is the fear of doing anything which might give us cause to apprehend His displeasure. The fear of God excludes all other fear, and is the true secret of fortitude and courage when put to the severest proof by the injustice, the cruelty, or the contempt of men.

Let us now revert to the argument urged by St. Peter. “*If ye call upon the Father, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*” In other words, If ye are Christians, if ye profess to be the children of God, and call upon Him in the spirit of adoption through Jesus Christ, consider what the conditions of that adoption require of you; and let it be a constant subject of anxiety—not disheartening, but awakening anxiety—with you, lest you should fall short of those measures of faith and holiness which are implied in such a near relation to God, and in such a privilege of approach to Him. Our relation to God, as the objects of His revealed truth and saving mercy, brings us into a more immediate contact with His attributes. If He is the universal Father of all mankind, He is in a twofold sense, and by a more direct connexion, the Father of Christians. If the traces of His goodness are impressed upon the face of created nature; if the host of heaven, and the sea, and the mountains, and the pleasant fields, and the fruitful valleys clearly show His eternal power and Godhead, upholding all things, and providing for the life and comfort of mankind;

to *us*, who possess the volume of revelation, all these testimonies are fixed, and heightened, and illustrated by the testimony of the Spirit, and leave us without excuse, if, when we thus know Him, we glorify Him not as God. If by the voice of conscience, speaking audibly from that shrine of justice which the Creator has erected for Himself in the hearts of His reasonable creatures, the claims of truth and right are asserted in the hearing of all who do not obstinately close their ears to the sound; if by the consequences which for the most part follow in the trains of virtue and of vice, He has marked upon the surface as it were of social life, the tendencies of His moral government, and the bearings of His will; what room for doubt, what excuse for inattention is left to *us*, who have the express law of holiness clearly laid down for our guidance in the written Word of God, placed before our eyes, bound upon our consciences, enforced by the ministers of religion, and by its ordinances and memorials? If a belief in the existence of a God necessarily involves a persuasion that He is in some way or other “*the Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him* ;” to *us* He is brought near, by the distinct imagery of His word, as delighting in the way of His faithful servants; as waiting for those that seek Him; as hearing the prayer of the lowly and the sighings of the contrite heart; as holding forth

a crown of glory to those who are brought to Him by His Son; as coming to them, and making His abode with them, even unto the end. And, lastly, if the reproaches of conscience, and the pangs of remorse, and the concurrent opinions of the wise and good, are so many foreshadowings of a future retribution, so many anticipations, undefined perhaps, and ineffectual, of a sentence hereafter to be passed by the Supreme Judge; to *us* all is made clear, distinct, and certain, by the disclosures of the Gospel. The veil is drawn aside from before the seat of eternal justice; the judgment hall is disclosed to our eyes in all its awful solemnity, and the books out of which we are to be judged are opened to us; for they are no other than the books of that law by which we are commanded to walk, and the register of our own conscience. Yea, and the sentence is already pronounced in the case of every one who will hear it: “*Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord;*” “*Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.*” And so it is that we are brought into a more immediate and personal view of the attributes of God, which are thus realized and made prominent in His Gospel. And if we feel the peculiarity of our situation in this respect, have we not great reason to fear, and to exclaim with the prophet, who saw the glory of the Lord, and heard the hymns of the seraphim:—“*Woe is me! for I am*

*“undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and
“I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips:
“for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of
“Hosts.”*¹ Undoubtedly, if a distinct symbol of the Divine presence were to be suddenly manifested in this assembly; if the Saviour’s promise, *“Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them,”* were visibly fulfilled; if our general belief of God’s omniscience were brought to a point by the consciousness of His direct inspection of every one of us at this particular instant of time, how should we be affected? What would be the predominant feeling? Fear, no doubt, a trembling and shrinking from the eye of Him who judgeth every man according to his work. All our demerits, which are now perhaps glossed over with a superficial covering of forms, and lost sight of in the tumult of worldly concerns and pleasures, would suddenly start up to view in all their deformity. Our unholiness would be felt as a dark and deadly stain, disqualifying our souls for appearing in the presence of God. Memory and conscience would assert their power, and perform their proper work; and the unrepented sins of a past life would crowd in upon us, and instead of welcoming our God with glad Hosannas, our first impulse would be to exclaim, *“Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”*²

¹ Isaiah vi. 5.² St. Luke v. 8.

And is it not abundantly evident, that since God is, in point of fact, as truly and really present amongst us, as though the visible Shecinah rested over the door of the Tabernacle, and the cloud of His glory filled the courts of His house ; we ought at all times to feel something of this holy fear, not prompting us to evade His presence, nor to hide ourselves in secret places ; but to make ourselves more meet for that inspection which we cannot elude, more familiar with that powerful, but benignant Friend, who is to be *feared* only that He may be *loved* ? I would not, however, be understood to say, that all, without exception, would be thus affected by the certainty of God's immediate presence ; there are those who live under an abiding sense of it, and to whom the certainty of that presence, recognised, not only in His works and His providences, but in the movements of their own hearts and the testimony of the Spirit, is an abundant source of joy and comfort, not of apprehension. Yet even they "*pass the time of their sojourning here in fear,*" lest the even and happy tenour of their communion with God should be interrupted and broken in upon, though but for a season, by those sins which the infirmity of their nature admits, when grace has been less diligently sought for, and temptations less carefully watched against than usual. Where is the Christian who has attained to that perfectness

of growth in Christ, and that stability of heart which leaves no room for fear, no occasion for repentance? Even in the best works of the best men, in the prayers and almsgivings, and meditations of the holiest saint, there are so many imperfections, there is so much inconstancy and inconsistency, that the most upright intentions, and the most entire reliance upon God, cannot exclude all apprehension from the soul. And if there were no cause of fear on our own account, still we should have to fear lest by our weaknesses, and defects, and errors, we should offend others, and impede the progress of the Gospel. All our actions should be viewed with reference not only to the question of our own salvation, but to the influence which they may have on the belief or the practice of those around us. We may be urged, by the invitations or example of others, or by our own inclinations, to join in some pursuit or amusement which we may be persuaded involves no violation of Christian purity, nor will in any wise impair the integrity of our religious character. Yet others join in the same occupation with a greater intensity of interest, with a stronger excitement of their passions, with a more evident disturbance of those forces, by which the soul is held in its proper course towards eternity; and they are encouraged and sanctioned, while others are scandalized and grieved, by our countenance

and example; and the unbeliever points to our inconsistency as a practical argument against the truth of the principles which we profess. There is no part of our conduct which we are not bound to examine with a jealous fear for the honour of God's holy name and the spiritual welfare of our brethren, abstaining not only from fleshly lusts, because they war against the soul, but from all doubtful and suspected indulgences, in order that with well-doing we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.

The time of our sojourning here is of necessity passed in the midst of dangers and trials; if it were otherwise, it would not be a state of probation. Our own ignorance and natural corruption; the artifices of the evil one; the multiplied devices by which the prince of this world attaches our affections to the present scene; the perversion of the best and holiest gifts of God, even of His Gospel; mistaken notions and improper use of the means of grace—all these are grounds of fear, even to him who is bent upon fulfilling the great purposes of his being, and who cordially accepts the proffer which God has made to him by His blessed Son. All these are the instruments of his trial, the methods of his probation; and therefore, although a persuasion that "*it is God who worketh in us, both to will and do,*" supports him with the assurance of final triumph, yet when he con-

templates the work to be done, and the conditions upon which God will condescend to work with him, he perceives, that if his salvation is to be wrought out at all, it must be “*with fear and trembling.*” When he employs himself in the necessary business of life, he will fear, lest his conversation should lose somewhat of its heavenly character and tendency ; when he tastes the pleasures of life, he will fear lest he should increase his disposition, already too strong, to love the things that are in the world ; when he listens to the calls of charity, he will fear, lest there should be somewhat of ostentation mingled with the holier motives of love, or somewhat of self-trusting righteousness. When he joins the assembled congregation in the house of God, he will fear, lest, without knowing it, he should have been led thither by habit, or the force of example, without any of that desire for the honour of God’s name, and the consolations of His word and sacraments, which the pious heart experiences in the returning opportunities of the Christian sabbath ; he will fear, lest his prayers should be rendered powerless by distractedness of thought, or by formality and coldness of heart ; lest he should hear the Word without effect ; lest to all his former sins there should be added that of misusing and nullifying the means of grace. And if he be a minister of that Word, much more cause will he have to fear, lest he should

handle it, if not deceitfully, yet mistakenly, or weakly and unworthily ; and above all, lest, when he has preached it to others, he himself should be a castaway. But, alas ! where are the symptoms of this holy fear to be discerned in the conduct of professing Christians ? What indications are to be seen, on the face of modern society, of that anxious solicitude, that wary circumspection, that suspicion of the tendencies of things, that prudent hesitation, which are all implied in the apostle's precept, "*Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear*" ? While a few are seen walking apart from the world's ungodliness and its vanities, as men who know that they have been "*redeemed from vain,*" as well as sinful "*conversation by the precious blood of Christ,*"¹ the multitude even of those who boast an interest in that redemption, either toil in the pursuit of gain with an eagerness which overlooks the more enduring interests of the soul ; or contend for the prizes of secular ambition ; or crowd, without fear or suspicion, into the beaten tracks of pleasure ; exhaust their spirits, and faculties, and best affections in a round of frivolous, if not of vicious indulgences, conscious of no fear, but the fear of missing one amusement, or of not being amongst the foremost in the ranks of fashion ; reckless of the tendencies and bearings of those pursuits, which

¹ 1 St. Peter i. 18.

are not perhaps, upon the face of them, grossly irreligious or immoral; and careless as to the gradual decay of all that is spiritual and heavenly within them; feeling no alarm at the growing coldness of their devotions, their distaste for the offices of religion and the study of God's Word; the progressive hardening of their hearts, and the strengthening of those secret fetters, by which the evil one takes and holds them captive at his will. In the midst of all that is bright and beautiful to see, and sweet to taste, and pleasant to hear, what fear have they, of the darkness, and misery, and bitter despair, which are in store for all those who forget God? Why should they, in the full sunshine of prosperity, and in the heyday of life and health, disquiet themselves with forebodings of that vexation and anguish which will overcloud the evening of their days? For an evening there will be; and this is the last consideration by which I would persuade you to "*pass the time of your sojourning here in fear*;" namely, that it is a time of sojourning, a little moment upon which eternity depends; that we are strangers upon earth; pilgrims on a journey; wayfaring people in an enemy's country; not yet at our place of rest and security; and therefore bound to vigilance and care. The night cometh when no work, not even that of repentance, can be done. The ground is crumbling away from beneath our

feet ; and before the brief space, which yet remains, is traversed, how much is to be done ! If in the midst of life we are in death ; if thousands fall around us on our right hand and on our left, without warning, perhaps without preparation, shall we refuse to fear, because the stroke has not yet fallen on ourselves ? Are we yet clad in the righteousness which is of God through Christ, and is it therefore that we do not fear ? Let the thoughtless votaries of pleasure, the slaves of this world's customs and opinions, the cold-hearted formalist propose to themselves these questions ; and if they will not yet be induced to pass the time of their sojourning here in fear, nor to redeem that portion of it which remains, there is still another Scripture, which one day, when it is too late, will ring in the ears and terrify the hearts of the careless ones : “ *The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of ; and shall appoint him his portion with the hypocrites : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* ”¹

¹ St. Matthew xxiv. 50, 51.

SERMON VIII.

THE LOVE OF GOD.

2 TIMOTHY III. 4.

Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

“*IN the last days,*” says the apostle, “*perilous times shall come.*”¹ It is disputed whether by the last days he intended those which immediately preceded the destruction of Jerusalem and terminated the Jewish polity; or, generally, the later ages of the Church, from its establishment to its final consummation. From his own time down to the present, at least since the first age of the Church, there has been no period, in which his prophetic description has not been too exactly fulfilled in some parts of that Church. “*Men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high minded,*

¹ 2 Timothy iii. 1.

“ lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” And yet with all this accumulation of unchristian qualities, the apostle tells us, that the persons whom he is describing would be externally and in profession Christians, *“ having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.”*¹ In a country where the Gospel has been received, and the Church of Christ planted, we may assume that the people at large are admitted into that Church by baptism, and so dedicated to the service of God. Yet even these may with great truth be classed under the two general divisions of the text; they are by pre-eminence either *“ lovers of pleasures,”* or *“ lovers of God.”* The pleasures, indeed, of which the apostle seems to speak, are the grosser pleasures of sense; and it is true that many persons are exempt from the influence of these, who yet can hardly be called lovers of God. But let the term “pleasures” be understood to mean all those lusts and vanities of the world, against which our Lord and His apostles so frequently and so earnestly cautioned their disciples, and we shall find the distinction running pretty generally and plainly through all ranks and descriptions of men; they are either *“ lovers of pleasures,”* or *“ lovers of God.”* The different degrees of their attachment to either object of regard, are generally the measure of their religious character, of their usefulness to

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 2—5.

society, and of their chance of everlasting happiness. It is in fact the measure of their success in the great conflict, which is continually carrying on between body and soul, the outer and the inner man, the flesh and the spirit; and we know, that it will be the test, by which the professors of the Gospel will be tried on the great day of inquisition; when "*he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*"¹

The words of the text might justly have been applied to our first parents at the moment of their transgression; they were applicable to the whole human race, save righteous Noah and his family, when the flood swept them from the face of the earth; they were, in their fullest extent, descriptive of the heathen world, when Jesus Christ came upon earth; and although the pure and Holy Gospel has now been preached for eighteen hundred years, and the work of sanctification by the Spirit has been proceeding during all that time, they are still too true a character even of the Christian world. That I may not be thought to deal in general and indiscriminate censure, let us inquire more particularly into the real state of the case. But there is a question, which must be answered in the very outset of our inquiry; and that is, what is meant by the

¹ Galatians vi. 8.

love of God ? We do not hold, that it must of necessity be that abstracted and sublime devotion of the heart and soul, independent of all reference to His promises or His warnings, which some divines consider to be the only love of God which deserves the name. No doubt, a spiritual perception of His intrinsic beauty, a devout admiration of His attributes, is essential to the perfection of religious principle and feeling. But there is a very large class of mankind, who, by the constitution of their nature, or by the circumstances of their condition, are incapable of this exalted and disinterested affection ; or who at least can be brought to feel it, only by a long process of religious training, who are yet not deficient in a practical and operative love of God. Yet, to "*love God with all our heart, and with all our soul,*" implies a very strong and pervading kind of attachment, superior in efficacy to any other ; an affection mingling itself with all our other affections ; modifying, controlling, guiding them. This, then, *at least*, we may pronounce the love of God to be ; it is a sincere and hearty desire to glorify Him in all things, proceeding not so much from an apprehension of what He will do to us, if we act otherwise, as upon a grateful sense of what He has done for us, as our Creator, Preserver, and especially as our Redeemer. It is the love of a son towards his parent whom he has griev-

ously offended, and who has freely forgiven him. Our Saviour speaks of the love of God as comprehending the duties of practical piety and charity.

*“Woe unto you, Pharisees, for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God ; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”*¹

And St. John, the beloved disciple, declares that *“whoso keepeth His word, in him verily is the love of God perfected :”* and again, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments ; and His commandments are not grievous.”*²

This last clause is very important, because it points out the love of God rather than the fear of Him, as the true principle on which Christian obedience is to be grounded. Undoubtedly a holy fear of God is an essential part of the religious character ; but it is an apprehension of doing anything unbecoming our relation to Him, which may grieve and displease so merciful and kind a Father, rather than a dread of incurring the anger of a severe master—a filial, not a servile fear. And though sometimes even the fear of punishment will make itself felt, with the consciousness of particular transgression, yet the pervading and animating motive will be love. If we find the observance of God’s commandments grievous and irksome to us ; if we detect ourselves in considering how little we may do for Him, how

¹ St. Luke xi. 42.

² 1 St. John ii. 5 ; v. 2.

small a quantity of active goodness will be accepted as an evidence of our faith ; then the love of God is not in us, but the fear of Him ; we deal with Him as with a hard taskmaster ; and are more solicitous to avoid His anger than to conciliate His regard ; whereas “ *perfect love casteth out fear.*”¹ His own commandment is, “ *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*”² An expression, which, to say the least of it, implies a sincere devotion of the heart, and a perfect intention and desire to comply with His will ; and to think nothing of so much consequence, nothing so delightful, as the doing our duty to Him, and looking to Him for that reward which He Himself has been pleased to hold out to us as a powerful motive to love. “ *Keeping yourselves,*” as the apostle Jude says, “ *in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*”³ This is the love of God which is perfectly consistent with our moral constitution, and with our actual condition here ; and which may, therefore, be reasonably required of us. It is not too much to expect of us, that what we are able to do, or to forbear, for the love of the creature, we shall do, or forbear, for the love of the Creator. And the love, which is of power to do this, is not necessarily that ecstatic and transporting affection of the soul, which the

¹ 1 St. John iv. 18. ² St. Matthew xxii. 37. ³ St. Jude 21.

votaries of mysticism profess to feel; but a rational and serious, yet active and effectual love, which may be felt by all, whose hearts are susceptible of any religious impressions, and must be felt by all who would be truly religious.

But in this love of God, the world at large is lamentably defective; the thoughts, the pursuits, the habits of mankind in general bespeak them "*lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.*" The general bent of society lies this way; the customs of civil life, even the current of education, tend in the same direction; and it is only by vigorous efforts of the mind, or by opportunities of grace afforded to naturally docile hearts, that the mischief is remedied. Consider the manner in which we usually treat our children. We all know at how early a period, and in how distinct and unquestionable a shape, the corruption of the human heart displays itself; we need no other proof of the inherent evil of our moral constitution, than the waywardness of childhood. Yet it rarely happens that the treatment of that tender and critical age is fitted to counteract this propensity to evil. It rarely happens that children are trained in the right way by the operation of right motives. An injudicious severity, and an unlimited indulgence, are equally destructive of that state of the heart which qualifies it to feel and retain the love of God. When children are not terrified into obedience

by the threats of punishment, they are allured into it by the promises of some indulgence, which it were much wiser to teach them to disregard. They are thus led to set a higher value upon the pleasures of sense than upon the satisfaction which the consciousness of having done his duty, is capable of imparting, even to a child. In this respect I am persuaded that justice is not done to children. I believe that they are able, when properly trained and taught, to comprehend, and to be acted upon by right motives ; and are susceptible even of religious impressions, at a much earlier period of their lives than is commonly supposed. And well would it be for the future happiness and welfare of their offspring, if parents, and especially mothers (for upon them this delicate province is naturally devolved) would set before their children, from the first dawn of intellect, motives of action worthy of a reasonable being, as detached as possible from all selfish and sensual considerations, and calculated to introduce into their hearts, by natural and easy steps, the only principle which can be depended upon in after life, the love of God. It is surely no impracticable task, to impress even the minds of young children, after the first dawn and effort of reason, with the idea of One who made them, and watches over them unseen ; of One who died to make them holy and happy ; of One who sends good thoughts and kind affections

into their minds; and to think of such a Being will be to love Him. It were strange, indeed, if the love of God could not be felt by those, of whom the Saviour declared, "*Of such is the kingdom of God.*"¹ As life passes on, the passions increase in strength and activity, restraint becomes more irksome, indulgence more easy and more varied; still pleasure, bodily pleasure is held out as the reward of industry and obedience; under a thousand shapes it is presented to the young Christian, while at the same time he is continually reminded of his baptismal promises of abstinence and self-denial, and it is often undermining his better principles, when no suspicion exists but that all is right. I am not one of those who would impose an unnatural restraint upon the buoyant spirits of youth, or do violence to that elasticity of mind, which by its reaction may cause greater mischiefs than those which we desire to avoid; but still I do think that parents are far too diligent in seeking out unprofitable and unimproving pleasures for their children, when their simple tastes might be gratified by amusements of less frequent recurrence and less doubtful tendency. But so it is; pleasure, mere sensual pleasure, is always held out as the reward of industry, even by careful and religious parents. Much greater is the mischief, much wider the

¹ St. Mark x. 14.

devastation of feeling and principle accomplished by those who, by their excessive indulgence, teach their children to consult their own pleasure alone, and to yield the mastery to their own perverse wills at an age when alone there is any chance of subduing or controlling them.

The next stage of life, that of youth, is proverbially the age of pleasure. "*Flee youthful lusts*" is the emphatic caution of St. Paul to his young disciple, and it is a caution still repeated by the Word of God in the Church, and by parents and tutors and guardians; but it is too often given in vain; because it is given to those who have not been fortified beforehand, as Timothy had been, who "*from a child*" had "*known the holy Scriptures, which*" were "*able to make*" him "*wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*"¹ The love of God must be formed in the heart by the Word of God, implanted there by study and made vital by the Spirit. Where this preparation is wanting, we must not be surprised, if young persons turn out to be "*lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;*" they have been brought up in the constant pursuit of pleasure, accustomed to think it the great object of their lives; and we need not wonder if, when opportunity offers, they push this principle to the extreme of sensual indulgence. This is for the most part applicable

¹ 2 Timothy ii. 22; iii. 15.

only to young men; but surely the operation of the same causes is too often discernible in the gentler sex. They may not, it is true, violate the express precepts of the Gospel, nor even perhaps the decorum of society; but may we not trace the ill effects of early misdirection and indulgence, in an immoderate love of company, and gaiety, and admiration, and in a want of taste for the offices of piety and charity? But I am ready to confess, that the vitiating influence of a wrong education is far less perceptible in the female part of society than in our own; it is much less common to meet with a young man, who, in sober-mindedness and truth has made a deliberate choice of religion, and walks apart from the world, than with a Mary, who "*hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken away from her.*"¹ It may seem to be a gracious compensation for the penalty of pain and sorrow, laid upon them for the first transgression, that the religion of that Saviour who was in His human nature emphatically the "Son of a woman," should find its easiest access to woman's heart; and that they should be, as we believe them to be, the main instruments of diffusing its genial and salutary influences through society at large.

Pursue the inquiry into the next age of man. Is not pleasure still the main object of his being? Is there any branch of Christian duty, which he

¹ St. Luke x. 42.

follows with the same energy and animation as are excited by a thirst for pleasure? With one large class of men indeed, pleasure has then a powerful rival, but it is not religion, it is not the love of God. No; it is the business of money-making, covetousness; which, while it imparts a pleasure peculiar to itself, heightens the taste for grosser enjoyments, and in a singular degree unfits the mind for the contemplation and love of God. But yet business is to a certain degree necessary; and therefore let us put quite out of the question the time and thoughts which it requires to be devoted to itself; how do men dispose of the remaining portion of their time and affections? Too commonly in such a manner as to show that they are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. Certainly a much larger portion of both is bestowed upon worldly objects of delight, than upon the duties or offices of religion. A far greater degree of alacrity is manifested to partake of doubtful or unprofitable amusements, and still more of those which in themselves are innocent, than to show, by acts of piety and self-denial and charity, that they are devoted and watchful servants of their Lord. Compare the animated countenances and brightened eyes of those who are thronging to a theatre or an assembly, with the unfrequent and reluctant step, the careless and wearisome look of many, whom a sense of propriety brings to the

public offices of worship; the one borne, as it were, upon the wings of hope and desire; the other dragging their duties as a chain. Consider how the day of pleasurable appointment is longed for till it comes, and is regretted when it is past; while the Sabbath, with all its high and holy offices of comfort and instruction, is looked to as an interruption to the cheerful routine of life. And surely it will appear, that the apostle's description is still applicable to too large a portion of mankind. Indeed there are times when even the serious faithful Christian is painfully conscious of its being too applicable to himself. When by the side of his own habitual feelings and modes of life, he places those uncompromising precepts, "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world;*"¹ and "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind,*"² it is hardly possible for him not to feel some apprehension that he still loves the world too well, and his Heavenly Father not well enough. For my own part, I do not wonder at all, that men of ardent feelings and infirm judgment should so far have forgotten the practical nature of that trial to which we are subject, as to imagine that security was only to be found in solitude; and finding abstinence more easily practised than temperance, to with-

¹ 1 St. John ii. 15.² St. Luke x. 27.

draw from all intercourse with the world, and to devote themselves entirely (were it possible, which it is not,) to spiritual communion with God. I say I do not wonder at the error of those misguided visionaries; it is a natural and obvious error; but I do wonder at those professors of the Gospel, who, with all its prohibitions before their eyes, with the solemn covenant of their baptismal vow upon their consciences, can imagine, if indeed they do imagine, that an unlimited, unthinking participation in frivolous, for I will not say vicious pleasures, can be consistent with a religious, an improving, a hopeful state of mind.

But let us cast one glance upon the concluding stage of human life. There, at least, the scene will be reversed, and men will be found not lovers of pleasure, but lovers of God. It may be so. With those who have made the love of pleasures subservient to that of God in the former periods of their life, it will be so; but I am afraid that those who have dearly loved pleasures all their life, and who cease to love them only when they can no longer enjoy them, are not very likely, nor indeed qualified, to love God towards the close of it. The lamp of religion, which burns through a long series of years in a soul, from which the noxious vapours of sensuality are carefully excluded, which is trimmed and replenished from time to time

by meditation and prayer, continues to shed a mild, but steady light, to the latest evening of old age: but hard is the task, and small the promise of success, when it is first attempted to be kindled in a soul, long the seat of vice, and now of imbecility; first the dark and polluted abode of turbulent and unclean passions, and now their dreary sepulchre. I am afraid it more commonly happens, that an excessive love of pleasure in the meridian of life, subsides into a frivolous old age. No spectacle is more afflicting or unnatural, than that of a person, descending into the vale of years, disabled, but not sobered by the hand of time, looking wistfully back upon pleasures gone by, but not intent upon laying up for himself treasures in Heaven; still grasping at amusements, and clinging to a world which is crumbling away beneath his feet, while the Lord standeth at the door about to demand his account.

Is not this too faithful a picture of the Christian world? Is not the great distinction, laid down by the apostle, stamped on the features of society? Are there not in our institutions, our works of genius, our public edifices, our social habits, a thousand memorials and tokens of the fact, that men are lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God? Judge then whether it be not a duty incumbent upon those who "*watch over your souls as they that must give account,*" to exhort you to that seriousness and consideration, from

which the customs and manners of the world would lead you quite away. But do not suppose, that by seriousness we mean a gloomy and austere seclusion from all the pleasures, of whatever kind, which God has so plentifully set before us, and qualified us to enjoy. Those which He has not only qualified, but permitted us to enjoy, are by none enjoyed with a purer or a more unmingled satisfaction, than by him who is habitually under the restraint of religion. The pleasures of domestic life, of social intercourse, of rational conversation, the beauties of nature, and the trophies of art, are all unforbidden sources of delight, and materials of improving consideration to the serious and sincere Christian. Regarded as amongst those “*good and perfect gifts*” which “*are from above, and come down from the Father of lights;*” they are sanctified by the right and temperate enjoyment of them, and become so many fresh motives to the love of God. To this truth, many even of those, who are too deeply engaged in those worldly pleasures which the apostle proscribes, are not altogether insensible. But there is another class of pleasures, of which *they* have no perception nor idea; the pleasures of devotion and of charity; the happiness of honouring and conversing with God, and of promoting the good of mankind; the satisfaction of resorting to the House of God, to the chambers of sickness, to

the miserable abode of poverty; and of doing good to the Redeemer Himself, in the persons of His poor disciples. To do the will of God was the meat and drink, the sustaining and refreshing principle of Him, who has commanded us to follow His steps. And the great work which His ministers must labour to perform, is to undeceive mankind as to the real nature of that happiness for which they are intended; to persuade them that "*godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come,*"¹ the promise of true pleasure in time, and of salvation in eternity; and that the ways of religion are as surely "*ways of pleasantness,*" as "*her paths are paths of*" everlasting "*peace.*"

I entreat you to remember, that as long as you continue a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God, it is utterly impossible that you should have a just and convincing view of your real condition, as one of those whom Jesus Christ has purchased to Himself; that you should see the privileges, the requirements, or the hopes of the Gospel, as they are seen by the true believer. You may perhaps have a clear view of them in the abstract, but no feeling of their value, no experience of their efficacy. You will be like a person who has lost the faculty of discerning colours; and who may have a correct

¹ 1 Timothy iv. 8.

notion of the outlines of a picture, but no perception of its real life and beauty, its warmth and animation. You are, besides, out of the sphere, and beyond the influence of grace. While the love of pleasure is predominant, the source of grace is sealed up; the lover of pleasures cannot pray, unless the season of sickness or solitude should open the way to serious thoughts, and then let him pray for grace, that he may become a lover of God. Believe me, you cannot afford to lose any opportunity of cherishing religious affections in your soul. The world has great advantages over religion in a contest for the possession of your hearts; against its tangible and present allurements must be set serious reflection and earnest prayer; the careful study of God's word; the diligent use of His ordinances; frequent thoughts of eternity, of death and judgment, of heaven and hell. A fair trial will convince you, that there is nothing which gives even to the innocent pleasures of this world so true a relish, as the remembrance of Him who permits them to us, nor is there any other feeling by which we can safely determine at once what pleasures are innocent, and what are sinful.

Lastly, if we are indeed lovers of God, we shall be continually more and more so; the love of God is an affection of the soul, which under the influence of grace gradually expands and enlarges itself. Beginning with the first glimpse

of the divine mercies, and growing with the growth of our faith, it increases in intensity, and energy, and warmth, with fresh recollections of God's past vouchsafements, and with opening prospects of the promised riches of His goodness ; burns brighter and brighter, as the feeble light of life declines and wastes away, and receives its full and eternal perfection when the world and its pleasures are no more.

SERMON IX.

HUMILITY.

1 ST. PETER V. 5.

All of you be subject one to another ; and be clothed with humility ; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

A PARALLEL precept to this, is that which St. Paul gives to the Christians at Philippi : “ *Let nothing be done through strife, or vainglory ; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves.*”¹ Both apostles had learned the doctrine from that Master who had said, “ *Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart ;*”² and it was a lesson which they would never have learned unassisted by the grace of God, for it was contrary to their natural temperament and the bias of their minds, the one having been ardent, overweening, self-confident ; the other, a fierce and sincere zealot, firmly fixed in his opinions, and determined at all hazards to enforce them upon others. Yet these two, when

¹ Philippians ii. 3.² St. Matthew xi. 29.

once converted, and imbued with the genuine spirit of the Gospel, became as eminent for meekness, and forbearance, and humility, as the gentle and amiable John. It is not undeserving of remark, that the only passages in the New Testament where the words *humility* and *lowliness* occur, are in the sayings and writings of St. Peter and St. Paul. It is still more deserving of observation, that these words, in the sense belonging to them in the Christian vocabulary, are not used at all by ancient heathen writers, the poets, historians, and philosophers of the most enlightened nations of antiquity; enlightened in many directions, as far as related to the exercise of mind and the cultivation of taste, but miserably benighted and dark as to their relation to God, their duties, and their destiny.

Heathen morality, and heathen philosophy, did not recognise humility as a grace or virtue; and therefore had no name for the quality. "This virtue," says Augustine, "which teaches us to confess our sins, to humble our hearts; this virtue of saving life, which leads us to renounce ourselves, to think meanly of ourselves, to attribute nothing to our own strength, is not to be found in the books of pagans, whether Epicureans, Stoics, Manicheans, or Platonists."¹ It is therefore a

¹ "Hæc aqua confessionis peccatorum, hæc aqua humiliationis cordis, hæc aqua vitæ salutaris, abjicientis se, nihil de se

virtue peculiarly Christian, exclusively to be learned in the school of Jesus Christ, as it was pre-eminently embodied in His example ; for what stretch of humility, on the part of sinful, imperfect man, how highly soever exalted in intellect, dignity, or power, above the level of his fellow-sinners, can be compared with His, “ *who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.*”¹

But if the virtue be peculiarly Christian, it is manifestly essential to the Christian character ; one of those qualities, by the possession of which the believer in Christ is to be distinguished from those who are “ *still in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity ;*” one which cannot be dispensed with under any circumstances ; for which every condition of life affords some scope and opportunity, but which is most valuable and most lovely, when it is exercised under the

“ *præsumentis, nihil suæ potentiæ superbe tribuentis ; hæc aqua in nullis alienigenarum libris est, non in Epicureis, non in Stoicis, non in Manichæis, non in Platoniciis. Ubicumque etiam inveniuntur optima præcepta morum et disciplinæ, humilitas tamen ista non invenitur. Via humilitatis hujus aliunde manat ; a Christo venit.*”
AUGUSTINI in Psalmum XXXI, Enarratio ii.

¹ Philippians ii. 6—8.

greatest difficulties, and in spite of the most powerful obstacles. There is no limitation to the apostle's precept. He does not say, Submit yourselves, the poor to the rich, the weak to the strong, the simple to the learned, the peasant to the noble, the subject to the sovereign; but having first said, "*Ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder,*" he adds with emphasis, "*All of you be subject one to another.*"

The kind and degree of subjection to be practised by different Christians, depends upon their places and duties as members of human society; the form in which the grace of humility will show itself, will differ according to its objects and opportunities, but the spirit must be everywhere present, influencing the conduct and pervading the demeanour of every branch of the great family of mankind; a habit of thought, and word, and action; "*be clothed with humility.*"

Seeing that so much stress has been laid upon this distinguishing grace by Him who set the brightest example of it, and by His holy apostles, it is strange that so little account of it is made by the greater number of those who are members of the same family of which Jesus Christ is the Head, and His apostles the first-born brethren, and whose features, in this respect at least, may well be expected to resemble *theirs*, for humility is one of the least costly of the Christian virtues. Yet there is none in which all classes of men are

more deficient. A very large proportion of the evils and disorders which interrupt the peace of society and impede the growth of true religion, are clearly traceable to this source, the want of humility ; to this may be ascribed, if not always the beginning, yet certainly the continuance, of those feuds and dissensions, which are often insignificant in their origin, but most calamitous in their issues.

Quarrels, which interrupt or destroy the peace of families, even when they are not occasioned by pride, might in most cases be prevented by humility : for an acknowledgment, made by either party in a dispute, of his being in the wrong, is generally sufficient to disarm the resentment of his adversary, and paves the way to a restoration of peace. But here lies the difficulty. The confession of fault, or error, is one of the hardest lessons which a man has to learn ; it is often much easier for him to abstain from an indulgence, to forego a delight, than to admit that he has done wrong. Indeed, it is a lesson not to be effectually learned, except in the school of Jesus Christ, and by the help of His Spirit. It is the first lesson to be learned there, and the last. We must begin by feeling and acknowledging our own baseness and unworthiness ; and when, having found access to the Father by the Son, we have been sanctified by the Spirit unto obedience, we must be continually labour-

ing to repress the risings of spiritual pride, and not only to feel that what we have already achieved, has been achieved not by our own strength or goodness, but by Him who worketh in us both to will and to do, but also to understand how far we still are from that perfection, at which we are commanded to aim. But this state of mind, even if we attain to it, does not realise the Christian grace of humility in all its fulness and liveliness. Humility, though one in origin and principle, is of a twofold kind, as it respects the objects upon which it is exercised.

There is humility towards God, and humility towards man ; neither of them very easy of attainment ; but I know not whether the former be not the easiest of the two. In one sense indeed, it is not only easy, but natural and unavoidable. No man who believes that there is a God at all, can be otherwise than sensible of his immeasurable inferiority to the Author of his being and the Source of his faculties and powers. No reasonable being who believes himself to be a creature, can fail to be humble when he thinks of his Creator. But this kind of humility, as it is natural and unavoidable, cannot claim any high degree of praise. It costs us but little to acknowledge that we are far less powerful, wise, and just than our Maker. But it is not so easy to bring ourselves to a heartfelt conviction and

free acknowledgment of our deficiency as moral and responsible beings, to be judged of by God's perfect law, to feel and confess that we fall miserably short, not only of His perfections, but of that comparative degree of perfectness which He requires of us, and which it is possible, by His help, to attain. The humility which deserves the name of a Christian grace, is the humility of conscious sinfulness and demerit; which prompts the soul that labours under that burthen to exclaim, in its first approaches to an offended Father, "*God be merciful to me a sinner;*" which abides with it, when reconciled to Him in Christ, and leads it to confess, even after all the triumphs of grace, "*I am an unprofitable servant.*"

Now these confessions we make with our lips every day of our lives; at least every time we come to church and take part in the offices of public worship, many parts of which breathe the language of the deepest and most genuine humility. Nor is it by any means uncommon to hear persons avow with great readiness that they are undoubtedly sinners before God. But that does not constitute humility. It is not merely a general sense of our own imperfection, and of our proneness to sin, which is required of us, but a deep and disquieting feeling of the sinfulness of our nature, as evinced in particular acts or habits of conduct, sentiment, or speech. We

must not only know that we are sinful, but wherein we are sinners, and what our sins will lead us to, before we can be really humble, meek, and lowly of heart. We have great need therefore to be exceedingly careful not to imagine that we are clothed with humility, simply because we are at all times ready to confess our sins. In order to make it an abiding habit, an indwelling grace, we must diligently try and examine ourselves; we must be heartily sorry for our misdoings, which we can never be, unless we know what they are. The remembrance of them must be grievous unto us; the burthen of them intolerable. It is only to those that so "*labour and are heavy laden*" that the Saviour promises rest for their souls.

Now it is certain that we can never realize to ourselves our own sinfulness, nor clearly understand the position in which we stand before the Judge of all the earth, without a distinct knowledge of our prevailing sins, and a trembling anxiety about those which have escaped our own observation, but are noted down by Him, who has set our secret sins in the light of His countenance. But this knowledge cannot be attained without habitual self-examination. Every part of our conduct should form the subject of careful inquiry, with a view to discover, not in what respects it deserved praise, but wherein it offended against the perfect law of holiness or charity, or

wherein it fell short of the standard proposed to us by Him who has given us both the rule and the pattern. Many features of our character, which at first sight present nothing but what is pleasing and commendable, if examined minutely by the clear light of God's word, which is "*a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart,*" will disclose somewhat of darkness and deformity. Self-inquiry then, repeated frequently, and persevered in with earnest prayer, "Cleanse Thou me from my secret faults, and "make me to see the error of my ways," is indispensably necessary to Christian humility. Moreover, in comparing ourselves with others, with reference to our religious or moral character, it should always be with a view to discover, not in what respects we surpass them, but wherein they are superior to us, and may serve as an example for us to follow; and if we cannot avoid seeing their defects, let us regard them as reasons for our being thankful to God, that by His grace, and not for any merit of our own, He has preserved us from the sins or errors into which they have fallen.

Another, and a most important feature of humility towards God, is a meek acquiescence in all the decrees of His providence; a willing and thankful acknowledgment of His fatherly wisdom and kindness in all the dispensations of good or seeming evil with which He may see fit to try

the temper of our Christian faith. "*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.*"¹ All restlessness and impatience under the pressure of sorrow, or sickness, or poverty, is the struggling of pride against the ordinances of God; as, on the other hand, an uncomplaining spirit of submission to His sovereign will, under the most trying circumstances, is no doubt an exercise of humility peculiarly pleasing in His sight.

The cultivation and exercise of this grace in our relation to God, will prepare us for a display of its influence in our conversation with man. This duty the apostle places in the forefront of his precept, "*All of you be subject one to another;*" a precept which shows in a remarkable manner the power of Divine grace in changing the heart, if we remember that it proceeds from one of those very men, who before they were fully informed of the mind of Christ, and filled with the Spirit of His Gospel, were engaged in a strife, which of them should be the greatest. I have already said, that this branch of Christian humility is the most difficult, on account of the sense which we unavoidably have of our natural equality with one another; and of that desire of superiority, which is in itself, and under due regulations, a most important and useful element in our moral constitution, but

¹ 1 St. Peter v. 6.

can have no place in the motives which actuate us in our approaches to God, towards whom, however we may disregard or forget His commands, we can have no feeling of rivalry or competition. The test of our humility to God will be our practice of it towards our fellow-creatures; the one being the only motive of sufficient power to produce the other. Our natural feelings, and the opinions and habits of the world, impel us the other way; a sense of our common sinfulness in the sight of God, of our common relation to Him as His redeemed children, of our common obligation to copy the example of our Saviour's great humility, can alone enable us to resist that impulse, and to be willingly subject one to another. A sense of our relation to Christ, and through Him to our brethren, will dispose and enable us to realize the apostle's precept, "*Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.*"¹

A defect of this essential grace is, we think, one of the most striking and painful features of modern society, especially in this country. There is not, in the higher classes, that general condescension to men of low estate, which the

¹ Colossians iii. 12, 13.

apostle enjoins upon all, with reference to those whom Providence has placed beneath them as to the temporary advantages of this life. And this is a fault which pervades all the gradations of society down to the lowest. There is oftentimes as much pride and discourtesy on the part of the tradesman, or employer of labourers, towards the classes which are below him, and on the part of domestic servants towards one another, as there is on the part of the nobleman or gentleman towards them. The fault, however, is less prevalent, as you descend in the scale of civil life; and we are bound to state our belief, that there is more of real humility amongst the poor, as there is certainly more of charity, in proportion to their means, than there is amongst the higher classes. A failure in this respect is perhaps the most remarkable of the inconsistencies which are to be observed in the conduct of those who, upon the whole, may be denominated religious people. How common it is for persons, who are strictly observant of all the forms of religion, just in their dealings, and liberal to the poor, to treat their servants and dependents with a haughty coldness; and to insist, with the utmost punctiliousness, upon the observance of all the forms by which the pride of man has hedged in his own weakness, and strengthened the artificial distinctions of social life. Those distinctions are indeed most neces-

sary to the maintenance of order, and even to the exercise of some of the most important virtues; but nothing more enforces and confirms them, than to let it be seen, on the part of those for whose benefit they are established, that they do not value them from a sense of their own personal superiority, or from self-love; and they should be at all times ready to relax them as far as the established order of things will permit, and to remove from the minds of their dependents and poorer neighbours a painful sense of inferiority. On the other hand, an unwillingness to pay the customary marks of respect to those who, by their station or office, are entitled to them, indicates a want of humility on the part of those who withhold them. We may display a sinful spirit of pride towards those who are above us in the world, as well as to those beneath us: the Christian rule is universally binding in both directions, "*Render to all their dues.*"¹ It must, however, be admitted, that the danger of a failure in this respect is greatest, in proportion to a man's worldly elevation; the greater his advantages of rank, honour, and riches, the more need has he of all the motives which religion supplies to the practice of this essential grace of humility. When our blessed Saviour had washed the feet of His disciples, He said: "*Ye call Me Master and Lord; and ye*

¹ Romans xiii. 7.

*“ say well ; for so I am. If I, then, your Lord
 “ and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought
 “ to wash one another’s feet ; for I have given you
 “ an example, that ye should do as I have done to
 “ you.”*¹ By many Christians this precept was
 held to be binding in its literal sense, and it
 was for many ages customary, and in some few
 countries is so still, for kings, and great men,
 and prelates, at a certain season of the year, to
 go through the ceremony of washing the feet of
 a number of poor persons. But it is obvious
 that this outward act of humility would in time
 degenerate into a mere form ; and it is equally
 plain that our Saviour, by condescending to per-
 form that, which in Eastern countries was the
 most common and frequent of the menial offices,
 intended only to exemplify, by a striking in-
 stance, the duty of mutual condescension and
 kindness. This, at least, He meant, that in this
 respect we should copy His example. And yet
 if we consider His surpassing dignity, and the
 meanness of the office which He performed,
 which of us can say that he does habitually,
 or even frequently, act up to the spirit of his
 Saviour’s precept, or exhibit even a faint image
 of His exceeding lowliness and meekness ? How
 earnestly ought we all to pray, *“ Let this mind be
 “ in”* me, *“ which was also in Christ Jesus ; who,
 “ being in the form of God, thought it not robbery*

¹ St. John xiii. 13—15.

*“to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”*¹ Such is the example by which St. Paul enforces his injunction upon the Christians at Philippi. *“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”*²

Humility was the most conspicuous virtue of Christ Himself, and it must be the characteristic grace of Christians. It is related of the celebrated Bishop and Father Augustin, that being asked what was the first thing in religion? he answered, “Humility.” What was the second? “Humility.” What the third? “Humility.” And his answer was true, in this sense, that humility prepares the heart for every other Christian virtue, and opens a door for the free admission of divine grace. As the waters stand in the lowest places of the valleys, so the gracious influences of the Spirit of God find their way soonest into the lowliest heart, and remain there the longest. God *“resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble;”* and thus fulfils, in the most effectual manner, the promise of His blessed Son, *“he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”*

¹ Philippians ii. 5—8.

² Ibid. ii. 3.

But He will fulfil it in a still higher sense on that day, when all the temporary and artificial distinctions of the world shall be for ever obliterated, and there shall be no mark of difference between the multitudes assembled in the presence of Christ, but that of saints on the right hand, and sinners on the left hand of their Judge. Humility for the most part will be rewarded even in this life, if in no other way, yet by the equanimity and contentedness of spirit which it gives; but even if these should be severely tried by a more than ordinary measure of hardship here, its recompense will be proportionably great hereafter. “*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.*”¹ The lower He depresses you now, the higher He will raise you up in His own time. And if for a season, and it can be but for a season, you are doomed to sojourn in a hovel or a prison, and to encounter the world’s scorn and contumely, He, whom you serve, who had not where to lay His head, who was despised and rejected of men, and who ascended through suffering to glory, is waiting to receive you in His Father’s house, to sit down with Him on His throne, even as He overcame the world by patience and meekness, and is set down with His Father on His throne.

¹ 1 St. Peter v. 6.

SERMON X.

JACOB'S WRESTLING ; OR, THE POWER OF PRAYER.

GENESIS XXXII. 26.

And he said, Let me go ; for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

SUCH was the entreaty of the angel, who had wrestled with Jacob at Peniel until the breaking of the day ; and such was the answer of the patriarch, who had discovered that he was contending with a being of a superior nature in human form ; one of those angels who had not long before met him on his way at Mahanaim, of whom he said “ *This is God's host.*” No point is more clearly asserted in the Scriptures, than that it pleased Almighty God, in the earlier ages of His Church, to employ, in His intercourse with mankind, the agency of those spiritual beings who were created before the formation of man, of a purer essence, of more exalted faculties, and of larger capacities than the inhabitants of this globe of earth, whose “ *corruptible body presseth down the soul, and the earthy tabernacle weigheth down the mind that museth upon many*

things."¹ The existence of angelic beings is asserted, or taken for granted, in so many passages, both of the Old and New Testament, by the inspired historians, the prophets, the apostles, and even by our Blessed Lord Himself, that it seems to be impossible, if the Scriptures themselves be true, that this doctrine should be false. It is a vain attempt to explain away the Scripture expressions by supposing them to have been used in accommodation to a popular superstition. The frequent ascription of personal acts and attributes to the angels, entirely precludes such an explanation. In the books of Moses they are described as appearing in visible shape to the patriarchs, as becoming their guests, conversing with them, announcing to them the will and purposes of Jehovah; and, in the instance of Jacob, wrestling with him as a man; and our Lord speaks of Himself as having power to summon legions of angels to His aid; and as coming at the end of the world, in the glory of His Father, with His holy angels. Angels appeared in visible brightness, and spake with audible voices to the apostles; and St. Paul reminds his readers, as a motive to hospitality, that some had "*entertained angels unawares.*"² We have the same authority for believing that the ministry of angels was employed by Jehovah in his dealings with the people of Israel. "*The Law,*" says

¹ Wisdom ix. 15.

² Hebrews xiii. 2.

St. Paul, "*was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator ;*"¹ and he therefore calls it in another place "*the word spoken by angels.*"² It was an ancient and received opinion amongst the Jews, that God made use of the ministry of angels in His remarkable dealings with mankind : and they objected to the Gospel, that it was not delivered by angels, but rested on the authority of a man who had been crucified. St. Paul, therefore, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, institutes a comparison between the angels and Jesus the Messenger and Mediator of the New Covenant, and shows the superiority of the latter as the Son of God, the Heir of all things, the Maker of the worlds. We maintain, then, that it is altogether inconsistent to receive the Scriptures as the Word of Inspiration, and yet to deny the existence and personality of angels, or the fact of their having been employed by the Supreme Ruler of the universe as instruments and agents in the government of this world.

That these blessed spirits enjoy a nearer view of the Divine perfections, that their affections and energies are unfettered by the restraint of gross and earthly bodies, we might safely conclude if the Scriptures had not informed us that the angels stand in the presence of God, ready to do His pleasure, that they behold Him face to face, and that in subtlety and rapidity they are

¹ Galatians iii. 19.

² Hebrews ii. 2.

as a flame of fire. They are called "*holy angels*," "*angels of light*," "*excelling in strength*," "*elect angels*." That they differ from one another in nature, or in office, we collect from the description of St. Paul, who calls them "*thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers*."¹ And in the Revelation we read of Michael and his angels, opposed to the devil and his angels; and the former is spoken of by the prophet Daniel as Michael the great prince, called on that account the Archangel, or ruler of the angels, as Satan is termed by our Lord, "*The prince of this world*;" and by St. Paul, "*The prince of the power of the air*." With respect to the employment of angelic agency in the Church of Christ, I know of only one passage in the New Testament which bears directly on the question. In Hebrews i. 14, the angels are described as "*ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation*." But no account is given of the offices which they are sent forth to perform; nor of the mode in which they perform them; and it is fruitless, if not presumptuous, to speculate where the Scripture is silent; or to attempt a discovery of that, which, if it had been intended to be known by us, would have been revealed to us by the Spirit of truth. We know for a certainty our own duties and destinies, the will of God as to our conduct

¹ Colossians i. 16, and Eph. i. 21.

here, and His purposes as to our being and state hereafter. We know also that His providence continually supports and watches over us, and that His Holy Spirit enlightens, strengthens, sanctifies us. Whether He acts in the capacity of our Protector, Supporter, and Guide, by the direct operation of His Divine power upon our minds, and upon the chain of events which affect us; or whether in any degree or direction it pleases Him to employ the ministry of intermediate agents, is entirely unimportant to us, in a practical point of view, as long as we are not sensible of that agency. But it exalts our notions of the greatness and majesty of God, to contemplate Him as the Creator of a race, perhaps innumerable races, of intelligent beings, superior in essence and moral dignity to ourselves; and it magnifies His goodness in vouchsafing, first to create and then to save us, the lowest of them all. It places in a bright and striking light the merciful condescension of the Eternal Son of God, Himself an object of humble adoration to the angelic host, in taking upon Him our nature, and undergoing in the flesh that extreme penalty, from which even His ministering Spirits are exempt.

So far we may safely go, in forming to ourselves a notion of the existence and employment of the angels; and such are the practical conclusions which may be drawn, consistently with

reason and piety, from what the Scriptures reveal to us on the subject. Beyond this, all is obscure and uncertain; and let us beware of imagining for ourselves a class of intermediate deities, as it were, between the Supreme Governor of the world and His servants upon earth, and of paying to them any, even the least particle of that honour which He vindicates as exclusively His own. Into this error the Romish Church has fallen; against this error, with especial propriety of rebuke, one of the heavenly host himself has given a warning, recorded by the pen of inspiration. When St. John, in the vision of the Apocalypse, fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed him these things; then said the angel unto him, "*See thou do it not: I am thy fellow-servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.*"¹ Our own Church asserts no other doctrine than that which is plainly asserted in the Scriptures, and which is briefly expressed and applied in the Collect for this day; "O Everlasting God, who hast ordained and constituted the services of angels and men in a wonderful order; mercifully grant, that as Thy holy angels always do Thee service in heaven, so by Thy appointment they may succour and defend us on earth."²

¹ Revelation xxii. 9, and xix. 10.

² Collect for the Feast of St. Michael and all Angels.

So much I have thought it right to say, as being suggested by the words of my text, and as being appropriate to the services of the day. But this is not the most important nor useful application of the incident recorded in these words; "*he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*" We have in this remarkable occurrence a powerful encouragement to pray, and to be importunate and persevering in prayer. Just before it happened, Jacob had with much fervour and humility poured forth his soul to God, and besought Him for deliverance from his brother Esau; and at the close of the day on which he sent presents to Esau as a propitiatory offering, we read, that "*Jacob was left alone;*" he remained behind the rest of his company, in some retired place, no doubt for the purpose of spending the night in devotion, as our blessed Saviour, when about to choose His apostles, went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. "*And there wrestled a man with him,*" that is, an angel in the form of a man, "*until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint.*" The angel thus showed how easily he could have mastered Jacob, if it had been consistent with the objects of his message so to do. Jacob felt it to be the

touch of a superior being; and in answer to the angel's request, "*Let me go, for the day breaketh,*" he said, "*I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*" His heavenly antagonist granted that request, and blessed him, and changed his name from Jacob to Israel, that is, *a prince of God*; for, said he, "*As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.*" But man can have no power with God except by his prayers and services; and therefore the effectual striving of the patriarch with God, was a striving in prayer, of which his wrestling with the angel was only emblematical. And so it is explained by the prophet Hosea: Jacob "*by his strength had power with God; yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept and made supplication unto him.*"¹ "*And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel,*" that is, the face of God; for, said he, "*I have seen God face to face.*"

If we seek for the moral application of this history, we have it in the words of St. James. "*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much;*"² and we have, both in the incident and the application, a strong motive and encouragement to earnestness and perseverance in prayer. It is indeed one of the most striking marks of the divine original of the Bible, that it abounds with persuasions to prayer, with gracious invitations on the part of

¹ Hosea xii. 3, 4.

² St James v. 16.

our Heavenly Father to His erring and helpless children, to have recourse to Him, to commune with Him, to live, as it were, continually in His society and presence, and to make known to Him all our wants, with the fullest assurance of our prayers being heard and answered. Every imaginable method has been taken by the Holy Spirit to form us to a habit of prayer; command, entreaty, promises, recorded experiences and examples, are scattered through the sacred pages like cords of divine love, to draw us to a nearer intercourse with the Author and Protector of our being, who is emphatically described as *a God that heareth prayer*. I said that this peculiarity is one mark of a divine original, because it manifestly proceeds from an intimate knowledge of the wants and infirmities of human nature, and is precisely that which is found by experience to supply them all. Prayer is that which embodies all the religious feelings and sentiments, and gives them a practical influence upon our habits of thought and action; it is the secret of vigilance, and self-restraint, and heavenly-mindedness; and is the strength of faith and hope. Prayer keeps us within the precincts of God's holy place, and under a sense of His presence; guards us against pride and hypocrisy, and is the surest barrier against the intrusion of unholy thoughts and wishes.

But the prayer which accomplishes all this, the prayer which the Scriptures enjoin and exemplify, is not the mere formal expression of devout sentiments and pious wishes uttered from a sense of duty, or in compliance with custom, but the spontaneous breathings of a spirit seeking for consolation and strength, and a free and familiar, though serious and awful intercourse with the Father of Spirits : the communing of a child with its Parent ; the conversation of a man with his Friend, but that Friend loved and revered with an intensity of affection and respect greater than could be inspired by any earthly connexion. A spirit of absolute dependence, and unreserved submissiveness, and undoubting confidence, springing from a deep and habitual sense of our own unworthiness and helplessness, and from a conviction of the certainty of God's promises in His beloved Son, and of the efficacy of His merits and intercession ; this is the spirit which must dictate prayer ; and prayer so dictated will be enlivened and perfected, and carried to the mercy-seat of God by that Holy Spirit, who Himself "*maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*"¹

Prayer such as this will be our refuge in time of trouble. It was so to Jacob. He had recourse to the expedients which were suggested by prudence, and a knowledge of his brother's disposition,

¹ Romans viii. 26.

to avert the danger which appeared to threaten him. But he did not trust solely, nor even principally, to that. He prayed earnestly before he resorted to it, and when he had sent over the present to propitiate Esau, he remained alone, and wrestled all night with the messenger of God. No doubt he was engaged in prayer when the angel came to him and took hold of him, at a time when, as the prophet expresses it, he "*was stirring up himself to take hold of God.*"¹ And if there be any moment, at which we may expect the presence and support of a divine messenger, whether it be one of the angelic host sent forth to minister to us, or the Holy Spirit Himself making known His presence by the fulness of refreshment and consolation, it is undoubtedly the moment of prayer. The heart is then prepared and fitted for the reception of a heavenly visitant. All earthly and sensual motives and affections are shut out. The heart is swept and garnished, and can say to the Spirit, "Come, for all things are ready." In answer to the prayer of Daniel, the angel Gabriel was sent from heaven to explain to him the hidden mystery of his vision. Cornelius, we are told, "*prayed to God alway,*" and he was praying, probably with more than usual earnestness, when an angel came, and directed him where he might hear the word of salvation. Our Saviour was striving in

¹ Isaiah lxiv. 7.

prayer, under the pressure of the severest mental agony, when an angel appeared unto Him from heaven strengthening Him. And perhaps, if our eyes were opened, as the eyes of the young man were opened, when he beheld the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha, we should see some messenger of light and peace waiting upon every faithful servant of God at his hours of prayer, animating and encouraging his pious aspirations, warding off the assault of unholy thoughts, and breathing into his soul a consciousness of the divine protection and regard.

Let us observe that Jacob was alone, when this remarkable conflict took place: he had purposely separated himself from his company. It is a very important part of our religious duty to join in the public and common worship of God, with a view to do honour to His holy name, to excite in ourselves devout and charitable feelings, and to edify one another by the force of mutual example. But it is not then that we can strive most earnestly and closely with the Lord in prayer. It is in private, in our closet, when we have shut to the door, and are remote from the sight and hearing of all but Him whom we are seeking, that we feel most deeply and overpoweringly the nature of that relation in which we stand to our Heavenly Father, and give the readiest utterance to our feelings. We have then

time to scan, and liberty to declare our own particular wants and trials; and to plead most earnestly for relief. Our attention is more concentrated upon our own state and requirements, and we are able to individualize ourselves as the peculiar objects of God's merciful and condescending care. Private personal prayer is that, without which all other modes of devotion will be no better than empty forms.

We are to take notice, in the next place, that Jacob persevered in his struggle with the angel. He wrestled all night; and all that time, though not discomfited, he was not victorious. The length of time during which he strove in vain, did not shake his confidence, nor silence his prayer. He knew that the whole was of God's appointment, and for some special purpose. And when the angel made as though he would have left him, at the same time that by a secret touch of his power he caused the patriarch to feel his superiority, far from consenting to relinquish the ground which he had so long maintained, Jacob declared to him, "*I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.*" And this is the language, which, with all the humble confidence inspired by the sure promises of God, we may use to our Heavenly Father at the moment when we are surrounded with discouragements of every kind. If we have been long striving with Him in prayer, and are tempted by long delay to despair

of His answering, yet is it then peculiarly our duty, as His believing children and servants, to make a still more vigorous effort, and to exclaim, “ *I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.* And the blessing will be given ; the very effort itself will bless us, for it will strengthen our trust in God, and enliven our hopes, and make us more fit for the reception of spiritual influences. Even if the immediate object of our prayers should not be granted, we shall have been improved by our endeavours to obtain it, and shall in any case be brought nearer to God. And this last consideration is in itself a sufficient argument for perseverance in prayer. Jacob wrestled with the angel all night ; and had during that time a divine messenger in his grasp. As long as we pray, if our prayer be fervent and earnest, we are close to God, we detain Him, as it were, in our society : we do not suffer Him to escape us ; and if by a sudden touch of His grace He should put any of our limbs out of joint, if He should weaken the sinews of our pride and self-trust by a sudden conviction of our sinfulness and weakness, that may be regarded by us as a sure proof of His being engaged with us, and as an encouragement not to let Him go, except He bless us. It may seem wonderful to us that a Being of infinite knowledge and perfect goodness, should deal with us after this manner, and concede to perseverance and importunity that

which He withholds from the first expression of our desires, however earnest and sincere. But we know that He has so appointed it ; and we find by experience, that the moral effect of such an appointment upon ourselves is far more beneficial, than if our prayers were granted immediately, and as a matter of course. It is for our sakes, not His own, that God has made prayer the instrument of obtaining His mercies ; and it were easy to discover reasons in the constitution of our nature, why it is expedient for us that perseverance should be joined to earnestness in prayer, and therefore to conclude that God might annex a special blessing to perseverance, even if we had not an express declaration from our Lord, which removes all doubt on the subject, that God will “ *avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them,*”¹ i. e. although He delay for a long time His answer to their petitions ; and His own example in offering thrice the same earnest supplication to His Heavenly Father. The mercy of God will at last come in some shape or other, in answer to continual prayers, though it be long delayed. Instead of relaxing our earnestness, because we seem for a time to have prayed in vain, we should redouble our endeavours, and, as it were, besiege Heaven with holy importunity. If this expression appear

¹ St. Luke xviii. 7.

strong, it is not so strong as that which the Holy Spirit Himself has employed, when by the mouth of His servant Isaiah He encouraged the Church to pray: "*Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give Him no rest till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*"¹

The incident which we have now considered, was an incident much to be remembered by Jacob, and we read that he called the name of the place where it happened, Peniel; "*for, said he, I have seen God face to face.*" And surely, my brethren, we who have inherited the reality of those promises which the patriarch beheld only with the eye of faith, through the vista of intervening ages; we who have more express commands to pray, more positive assurances of being heard, a more distinct revelation of the truth, that the divine presence is vouchsafed to every assembly of the faithful met together in prayer,—we surely ought to be able to say, at least on every Sabbath, after the performance of our solemn acts of common worship, "*We have seen God face to face,*" we have felt the sensible tokens of His presence, in the confirmation of our faith, in the enlargement of our spiritual views and desires, in the disjoining of our proud reasonings and imaginations, in the growth of heavenly-mindedness and love. We

¹ Isaiah lxii. 6, 7.

have wrestled with a Messenger from God, we have obtained a blessing from Him. If we could engage, and surely we ought to find no difficulty in so doing, in the duty of prayer, and strive therein with anything like the same determined purpose and earnest perseverance with which men enter into a competition for the prizes which are offered to us by the world, we should realize all the promises which are held out to us as an encouragement to pray, and experience the graciousness of those "*times of refreshment*" which come "*from the presence of the Lord.*" We should go forth from the house of prayer, or from the place of our more secret devotions, not halting, as Jacob halted, when he passed over Penuel, but walking in our uprightness, and in the strength imparted to us in answer to prayer, a humble, holy, homeward walk. For "*they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.*"¹

¹ Isaiah xl. 31.

SERMON XI.

THE DUTY OF SCRIPTURAL INQUIRY.

ACTS XVII. 11.

These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

THE Church at Thessalonica was founded, as it was elsewhere, amidst calumny and opposition. When St. Paul “*reasoned with*” the Jews “*out of the Scripture, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead,*” because it had been foretold by their prophets that such would be the case with the Messiah, or Christ, and that Jesus whom he preached unto them, and in whom those prophecies had been fulfilled, was Christ, a few only of that nation believed the word; while the rest, “*moved with envy, set all the city in an uproar.*” In order to avoid the danger which threatened them, Paul and Silas were sent by the brethren to Berea; where, upon entering into the synagogue, and declaring to their brethren of the

Jews the same doctrine, they met with a very different reception. "*These*," says the sacred historian of the Berean Jews, "*were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so*;" that is, whether the doctrines which the apostle taught concerning Jesus, as the promised Messiah, or Christ, were indeed conformable to the prophecies and declarations of the Old Testament; in which, as our Saviour had said to the Jews, they thought they had eternal life.

I propose in this discourse to show that the conduct of these Bereans was that of honest and prudent men; and to make a practical application of the incident to our own case. And may that Holy Spirit, who speaks to us in the Scriptures both of the Old and New Testament, guide us in our meditations to discover the truth, and when it is discovered, to embrace and hold it fast!

The Bereans received the Word with all readiness of mind, and because they so received it St. Luke says they were more *noble* than their captious and prejudiced countrymen at Thessalonica. The word translated *noble*, means literally, *well-born*; but it is evidently used with reference to that true nobility of nature, which depends not on the accident of birth or the conventional regulations of society. It is cha-

racteristic of such a nature to love the truth, and therefore to be desirous of finding it: and the more important the object of inquiry is, the more ready will a truly noble mind be to use all the right methods of discovering the truth, and to admit and adhere to it when discovered. Now the very first object of inquiry to reasonable beings, whose conscience tells them that they are accountable to a superior power, is to seek for a sufficient rule of action. That such a rule is not to be found in conscience itself, is almost universally acknowledged. There is undoubtedly a rule written in the heart of man by his Creator, and such a rule as in a certain sense accuses, or else excuses him; but it is a rule, which, however distinctly it was written at first, is now darkened by the corruption of our nature, and the conclusions which it suggests are neither peremptory nor clear from doubt. No serious and candid man can read the world's history, or observe what is passing within his own breast, without coming to this confession. If we are told that the light of reason is sufficient to guide, and the power of conscience to restrain mankind, we reply, Look at the history of the human race, and point out any period of time, since the fall, at which this has been the case. The Deist, who rejects Revelation, may perhaps in these days live outwardly like a Christian, partly because he feels that the

credit of his principles is at stake, and partly because he is insensibly borne along by the current of Christian knowledge and feeling which surrounds him; but the rule which he follows, however he may disguise it to himself, is not that of his own unassisted reason or untutored conscience; but, in the main, that of Gospel morality. Such has been the effect of Christianity upon the general principles and habits of mankind in those countries where it has been received, so surely and intimately does its benign and purifying influence pervade the sentiments, and influence the practice even of those who disown its authority, that no person can now be permitted to argue in favour of natural religion from its efficacy in his own case, or in that of those who think as he does. The Author of light and truth has made the Sun of His Gospel to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends the light of heavenly knowledge on the just and on the unjust, although to the latter it is only an enlightening, not a saving knowledge. No man, to whom the truths of Christianity have been made known, can set himself free from the service of Christ, nor shut his eyes against the flood of light which the Gospel has shed over the world. But if we recur to the experience of those ages and nations which enjoyed no certain revelation of the will and purposes of God, we shall discover abundant proof, that a simple

knowledge of His existence, and even of His attributes, is an inadequate motive of human conduct, and conscience is an imperfect rule. The soul of man, feeling its responsibility to an unknown power, and hoping, and longing to believe that it is immortal, would fain discover a more authoritative teacher, and a surer guide ; and looks earnestly and wistfully to the Source of its being, as to the Source also of that knowledge for which it is athirst.

One of the first duties, then, which natural religion suggests, is an inquiry after the revealed will of God. For natural religion teaches us, that God requires of us a course of obedience to His will ; and yet it cannot certify us as to the extent of that requirement, nor as to the means of remedying the consequences of an imperfect obedience ; questions of infinite importance to every one of us, but respecting which, we can have no assurance but from God Himself in the way of direct revelation, which, therefore, it is reasonable to expect that God will vouchsafe to make. If such a revelation has at any time been made, it can never be safe for any man, who has had an opportunity of knowing it, to fashion his belief or his conduct by any other rule : and no man, who is told that there is in the world that which professes to be such a revelation, can safely or innocently forbear from taking notice of it. If, then, there be a religion, professed by a great

part of mankind, which demands in the most authoritative manner the respect and obedience of all; which is in all respects conformable with the sure principles of natural religion and the dictates of conscience; and which is said to possess all the evidence of authenticity that reasonable men can require, and the nature of the case admits of, it may be doubted whether scepticism itself, when it is the result of inquiry (if indeed it can ever be the result of serious inquiry) be not more excusable than a state of careless indifference.

Thus then it is the plain duty of every man to inquire into that which is proposed to him as a revelation of the will of God; to know in whom to believe, and what to believe; and when he is directed to the Bible, as the one only foundation and sanction of his duties and his hopes, he must follow the example of the noble-minded Berceans, and *search the Scriptures daily, whether these things be so*. No man can be thoroughly religious, unless he is convinced that his religion is true. A firm belief of the truth of Christianity, its entire and unalloyed truth, is indispensably necessary to the strength of religious motives and the certainty of religious hope. The mode of attaining to that conviction differs according to the capacities and opportunities of different persons. A large class of mankind must of necessity receive it, as they receive by far the greater part of their

knowledge, on the authority of others, as far as its outward evidences are concerned. Of the internal marks of authenticity contained in the Gospel itself, of its holiness, and simplicity, and benevolence, of its accordance with the dictates of conscience, of its entire suitableness to all the spiritual wants of human nature, all are in some degree able to judge. Indeed, this last kind of evidence, which influences the understanding through the heart, the evidence of a man's own personal experience of the blessedness and power of Gospel truth, is after all the most convincing; and without it all the others will be defective, and not thoroughly satisfactory: and in many cases it stands instead of all the rest. Where all other means of assurance are wanting, the defect is supplied to the ingenuous and pious mind, the honest and good heart, by the inward testimony of that Holy Spirit who "*beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.*"¹ He who desires to act up to the principles of the Gospel, and prays for grace to do so, will not want an inward and heartfelt assurance that the Gospel is true. "*If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.*"² The duty of inquiring into the grounds of our religious belief rises in obligation and extent, according to the advantages we enjoy for performing it. If for the due cultivation of our

¹ Romans viii. 16.² St. John vii. 17.

respective talents a strict account will be demanded of us, in proportion to their value and the means we have had of improving them, must we not expect that one prominent item will be, our application of those talents to the most important and profitable of all subjects, the relation in which we stand to Almighty God as the creatures of His hand, preserved by His providence, redeemed by His love, and made capable of inheriting His heavenly kingdom? Although it is possible that a man may feel a lively devotion and a sincere respect for all the precepts of the Gospel, as well as a firm belief that Jesus Christ has died for his sins, and risen again for his justification, without ever having examined the direct evidence upon which it claims his assent; yet certainly his devotion will be enlivened, his faith strengthened, and his obedience confirmed by such an examination, whenever he takes it in hand and follows it up in a right spirit and with prayer. And if ever it should occur to him, as surely sometimes it must, to propose to himself the question, Why am I a Christian? it will be an unspeakable comfort and satisfaction to him to be able to say; I am a Christian, not simply because I was born in a Christian country, and have been educated in Christian principles and habits; but because I have *searched the Scriptures whether those things be so*; because I have well considered the grounds upon which the

Gospel asserts its paramount authority over my conscience, and am convinced, upon testimony from which my reason cannot withhold its assent, that it is indeed the way of life; that Jesus is the Christ, and that “*there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.*”¹

And further than this, since Holy Scripture is the sure test whereby to determine of any particular branch of God’s holy Catholic Church, whether or no it be a true branch, are we not bound to satisfy ourselves that we belong to such a branch, by applying that test to its doctrines; and to convince ourselves that we cannot, without endangering our salvation, enter into communion with a Church which teaches as necessary truths doctrines, some of which are without warrant from Holy Scripture, while others are directly opposed to it? He who solemnly promised at his baptism to be Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto his life’s end, ought surely to have frequent recourse to the armoury of God, and to furnish himself with store of those weapons with which he may withstand the assaults of the devil, and foil the attempts of those who do the works of the devil, to wrest from him his faith and his hopes. He should seek by diligent study and meditation of the Word of Truth to be rooted and grounded in a knowledge of the surpassing love

¹ Acts iv. 12.

of Christ, learning by constant exercise to wield with effect "*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,*"¹ and being "*ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh*" him "*a reason of the hope that is in*" him "*with meekness and fear.*"²

Suffer me, my brethren, to ask of you, and let each one of you take the answer from his own conscience; is this a true description of the manner in which *you* deal with the Scriptures, as being to every one of you the charter of eternal life? Have you ascertained, if by no other means, yet by a careful and habitual examination of the instrument itself, that it is an authentic instrument, and that your own title is a good one? If you have not gone to the very foundations, and examined how securely and immovably they are laid on the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the head corner-stone; if you have not weighed the evidence of history, nor contemplated the marks of truth, which are conspicuous in the holiness and sublimity, as well as in the simplicity and intelligibleness of the Gospel, yet have you tested its truth by the effects produced upon yourself by a diligent study of the sacred Word, its softening, purifying, elevating influence on the inner man? If not, if you have never taken any of these methods to satisfy yourself that the Bible is indeed the

¹ Ephesians vi. 17.

² 1 St. Peter iii. 15.

very Word of God, do you treat it as sincere inquirers after the most important of all truths? Are you not sadly wanting in that nobleness of mind which led the Bereans to search the Scriptures daily, and which long before their time broke forth in the Psalmist's passionate exclamation, "*Oh, how I love Thy law! it is my meditation all the day.*"¹

But the noble-mindedness for which St. Luke commends the Bereans, consisted not merely in their readiness to search the Scriptures, but in the candour and honesty with which they pursued the inquiry. They were not shocked, as was the greater part of the Jewish nation, at finding in Jesus a person who was undeniably sent from God, but widely different from the Messiah whom they had been taught to expect; nor did they at once reject a religion which was opposed to all their preconceived opinions. This conduct was indeed worthy of commendation. The light of truth is not so irresistible to individual minds, as some persons pretend. The eye of reason may be obscured by pride and prejudice. The clearness of its vision is yet more effectually dimmed by habitual sin; for gross indeed is the darkness, with which habits of vicious sensuality overspread the mind. We must "*receive with meekness the engrafted Word,*" and meekness implies purity as well as a freedom from pride. We must deal

¹ Psalm cxix. 97.

with the light, not as lovers of darkness, not corrupting the Word of God, nor perverting the Gospel of Christ, but receiving the truth at His hands with singleness of heart, satisfied that what He requires us to do is for our good ; and that what He requires us to believe must be true.

That Scriptural inquiries *may* be so conducted as to end in doubt or unbelief on the one hand, or enthusiasm and fanaticism on the other, instead of a settled conviction, and a sober faith, is indeed too certain. Men may make an ill use of the Word of God, as of His other good and perfect gifts, and wrest it to their own destruction. But this only shows the necessity of pursuing our researches in a sincere and teachable frame of mind. To comprehend the most important parts of Holy Scripture, and to perceive their truth, nothing more is required than a common understanding and an honest heart. Other parts require the exertions of a more cultivated intellect, while some are difficult and mysterious even to the learned and acute. The Divine Author of revelation may possibly see fit to exercise and try our reason, as well as our passions, and require us to mortify the pride of the one, no less than the vehemence of the others. They certainly make an improper use of Scripture, and sin wilfully against the truth, who set themselves to study it with a determination to believe

nothing which they cannot fully comprehend; who endeavour to bend the straight line of God's truth to the crooked standard of their own opinions, warped by pride and affection, instead of rectifying the obliquity of their own minds by the unerring rule of Scripture. This is wholly inconsistent with that love of truth, that sense of natural weakness, and that deference to inspiration, which must be found in all who desire to know God as He has revealed Himself in His Word.

Having thus considered in what respects the conduct of the Bereans merited the commendation of St. Luke, I proceed to apply the lesson to ourselves. This indeed has to a certain degree been already done; for in explaining the wisdom and noble-mindedness of their proceeding, I have in fact described what our own ought to be. But we must go further than this. What has been hitherto said, related chiefly to the duty of examining the grounds upon which we believe the Christian religion to be true. When that has been once ascertained, the duty of searching the Scriptures rises in sacredness and importance. When we have discovered where the revealed will of God is to be found, we have then to inquire what it is, and what are the methods and means of performing it; questions, by the side of which all others shrink into insignificance; questions involving the right conduct of our

present being, and the welfare of our everlasting state. It is our duty to search the Scriptures, for in them we know that we have eternal life; to search them as God's own Word, for the discovery of His will and counsels, and the enjoyment of His promises; for the guidance of our lives and the strengthening of our souls, which must look in the Bible for their daily food and nourishment, and learn there the methods of obedience, and appropriate the promises of grace. Without this, the nourishment which is conveyed by the sacraments, and the grace of which they are channels, will not be tasted largely, nor flow freely. It is there, in the Bible, as in a faithful mirror, by diligent contemplation of its own wants and weakness, of God's holiness and power and mercy; but above all by studying, in the Person of Jesus Christ, the perfect Pattern and abundant Source of all grace, that the soul, beholding in Him the glory of the Lord, is "*changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*"¹ And since this is a change, not wrought in us suddenly and all at once, but gradually and by progressive degrees by the Spirit who speaks to us in the written Word, it is evident that the diligent study of that Word is needful to every believer; to the confirmed Christian, as well as to the doubtful seeker after truth, and to him

¹ 2 Corinthians iii. 18.

who is not yet rooted and grounded in love and faith. It contains not only "*milk*" for those who are "*unskilful in the Word of righteousness,*" but also "*strong meat for them that are of full age,* "*even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*"¹

Negligence and indifference, in this respect, are the great drawbacks upon the growth of religion in the world. The self-called philosopher, and the worldly-minded man, who is too much occupied in the pursuits of this life to be as anxious as he ought to be about his prospects in another, take for their rules of action the maxims of human wisdom, or the calculations of present gain or loss; and when we speak to them of natural corruption, of the necessity and reality of an atonement for the sins of mankind, of justifying faith, and sanctifying grace, of a resurrection and a judgment to come, they act as the Athenians did to St. Paul, "*some mocked, and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.*"² They who are sensible of their own utter unworthiness, and God's infinite mercy; who lament the imperfections of their present state, and aspire earnestly to a better; they only listen with meekness and seriousness to that Word which conveys the message of holiness and of hope, receiving it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God; and not

¹ Hebrews v. 13, 14.

² Acts xvii. 32.

only listen to it in the public teaching of the Church, but read it in private, and meditate upon it with prayer for the inward teaching of the Holy Spirit.

How does it happen that so many, who believe the Bible to be true, are so negligent in the study of it? If the world were at this moment in darkness and the shadow of death, without any certain knowledge of the will and purposes of its Maker, and an angel were suddenly to descend from heaven, and with a great voice, as of a trumpet, proclaim that he was come to deliver to mankind a written message from the Most High God, concerning their present conduct and future happiness, how would all but those who were stupefied by sin, press eagerly to read the important document, and lay its contents to heart! But the revelation which, under such circumstances, would be thought so important and interesting, is surely not less important, because we have possessed it for so many centuries. Less interesting, alas! we deem it to be, for that very reason: for it is an infirmity of human nature to disregard that with which it is familiar, whatever may be its intrinsic value and importance. It has been more than once observed, and with too much truth, that the only people in the world who are inattentive to the books of their religion are Christians. Mahommedans learn by heart large portions of

their Koran ; the Hindu Brahmin loves and learns the institutes of his idolatrous faith ; but Christians neglect the Gospel, the charter of their spiritual freedom, the covenant of salvation ! Therefore shall they, even the Mahomedan and the heathen, rise up against us in the judgment and condemn us. Surely, surely, my brethren, the truths which are proclaimed to you by the ministers of religion are too momentous to be heard with indifference, or taken upon trust, if you have the means of satisfying yourselves whether they be indeed truths or not ; when it is in your power to “ *search the Scriptures daily, whether those things be so.* ”

Consider how necessary it is to your religious stedfastness and to your own comfort, when sin besets your soul, or difficulties perplex your reason, or when the emissaries of a corrupt Church endeavour to seduce you from the simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus, to be able to say, No : I will not do this thing, and sin against God, not merely because I have heard the minister of religion say that it is wrong, but because I see it forbidden in the Word of God ; I believe this truth, not as having been persuaded by the reasoning or the eloquence of man, but because the Word of God declares it. I reject this error, because I find no sanction for it in the Bible.

My Christian friends, we do not desire that

you should rest your faith upon anything that *we* can say, whatever we may be enabled to do towards its confirmation. We do not imagine that our exhortations can have power to turn one sinner from the power of Satan to God, except by directing his serious and earnest attention to that Word upon which we found all our arguments. That Word which, when suffered to exert its proper influence, and driven home by the Holy Spirit Himself, in answer to prayer, “*is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit—and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*”¹ Our office is that of shepherds and guides, to lead you to the green pastures and living waters which are to be found in the Gospel and the Church. We tell you that you are here in a state of trial and preparation for a better life; that God has given you a clear and positive rule by which you are to walk during your journey to that more perfect state; that He has revealed certain truths which He requires you to believe; and appointed certain means whereby alone you can be admitted into His kingdom; and we exhort you, as reasonable beings, who have souls to be saved, or lost, “*Search the Scriptures daily, whether those things be so.*”

¹ Hebrews iv. 12.

SERMON XII.

GOD'S LAW IN THE HEART.

PSALM XXXVII. 31.

The law of his God is in his heart : none of his steps shall slide.

THIS is one of those truly spiritual yet practical sentences, which abound in the Book of Psalms, and make it so precious a manual, both of principles and conduct, to every one who seeks to realize to himself the character which St. Paul has given of the entire Scriptures of the Old Testament, as being “*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*”¹

The book of Psalms is in truth an epitome of the whole Bible, both as to its most important facts, and its vital doctrines ; and it is not possible, I think, for any person to study it with

¹ 2 Timothy iii. 16, 17.

seriousness of heart and honesty of purpose, and to apply it practically to his own feelings and conduct, without being convinced that it is indeed a part of the true Word of God, nor without experiencing a large measure of that improvement, which every part of that Word, when laid to heart, can never fail to produce.

To fix in our memories the maxims of inspired wisdom which are there delivered in the noblest yet the simplest language ; to appropriate to ourselves the penitential confessions of the Psalmist, and to kindle our devotion by his glowing hymns of praise ; these are amongst the most profitable and consolatory exercises of piety ; suited to all ages and conditions, to all classes of intellect, and to all circumstances of life. It may appear strange that the Jews, God's own people, possessing such a manual of truth and godliness, should have so greatly mistaken the nature of true religion. They had been directed by Moses to bind the precepts of the law for a sign upon their hand, and as frontlets between their eyes ; a direction which the Scribes and Pharisees of our Saviour's time observed to the letter, neglecting the spirit of the precept. They made broad their phylacteries, bands of parchment inscribed with sentences of the law ; and enlarged the hem of their garments, on which were embroidered texts of Scripture. But all this, as our Lord told His

disciples, they did to be seen of men. The more important part of the Mosaic precept they utterly neglected; "*These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thy heart.*"¹ The outward signs, intended only to be expressions of their reverence for God's law, and mementos to remind them of its authority, they had substituted for the vital principle of faith and obedience. Their religion, holy and spiritual in itself, had ceased to be so with them, because it was written in their books and on their garments only, and not on the tables of their hearts. The natural consequence of this was, an almost total degeneracy and corruption of manners; gross hypocrisy towards God, and uncharitableness towards men; an affected preciseness in all the outward observances of religion, with an entire disregard of its spiritual requirements and substantial duties. But this perverseness was not peculiar to the Scribes and Pharisees of our Saviour's time. We know too well the proneness of mankind in general to rest in the form of things, and to neglect the substance, especially in religion. It is much easier to pray than to practise, to read and repeat the Word of God, than to embody it in our lives. And unless we keep a strict watch over our minds, and continually bring before them the true nature and end of religion, and make them apprehend its

¹ Deut. vi. 6.

realities, we soon come to attach an undue importance to outward expressions and observances, to the depreciation and neglect of that pure and spiritual service, to which external rites are but subsidiary aids. We cling to the props and scaffoldings of the edifice, instead of labouring to be built up, as lively stones, unto an holy temple in the Lord.

Undoubtedly there is reason to fear that too many of those who have been admitted by baptism into the family of God, have scarcely any notion of religion beyond that of coming to church and taking part in the appointed solemnities of public worship; although every time they enter into the courts of the sanctuary, they are reminded, on the authority of God's Word, that no service will be pleasing to Him, or profitable to themselves, which is not the true expression of a principle of faith, rooted in the heart, watered by the dews of the Spirit, and bringing forth its fruits. Too many seem to look upon religion as a wedding garment of holy thoughts and affections, not to be worn on ordinary occasions, but only then to be put on when we are invited to the sacred solemnities of the Church, the marriage festivals of heaven. When we see so great an inconsistency between the profession and practice of many who are living in the clear light of the Gospel, with all the advantages and encouragements of a pure

and perfect Revelation, we need not wonder that the Jews fell into the fatal error of placing the essence of righteousness in outward observances, which are the aids, and expressions, and instrumental means of religion, not its spirit nor its substance. Yet they might have learned a more excellent way from their own Scriptures, especially from the book of Psalms.

Amongst the divine truths contained in that admirable book, few can be selected more descriptive of genuine religion, its proper seat, and its certain consequences, than that in the text which describes the righteous man: "*The law of his God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide.*"

It is scarcely necessary to explain what is meant by the law of God. It is the will of God, as man has the means of knowing it. Amongst the patriarchs who served God before the flood, a knowledge of His will was handed down from father to son from the beginning, and was from time to time enforced upon them by express revelation. It was then written nowhere but in the believer's memory and conscience. It was familiar to Enoch; and his habitual study and observance of it led him through ascending steps of perfectness into the immediate presence of God. It was known to Noah, and was deeply engraven in his heart. Therefore it was the preservation of himself and of his house. With

Abraham and his descendants for several generations, a knowledge of God's will was preserved by tradition, and by immediate communication from on high. But to the children of Israel Almighty God was pleased to make known His will, by the mediation of His servant Moses, more fully and explicitly; to command specifically its observances, and to annex the promise of a reward to obedience. The law of God was then first embodied in a written code. The consequences of disobedience, and the rewards of faithfulness, as exhibited in the wonderful fortunes of His chosen people, were recorded by inspired historians; and their writings formed, in the Psalmist's time, that sacred volume which is termed the law, the statutes, the ordinances, the testimonies of the Lord. The law of God, in the Christian sense of the term, embraces a larger scope both of precept and promise. We have a more perfect knowledge of God's will, and clearer prospects of His mercy. We have been made His children by adoption and grace, and furnished with every help to obedience. We have set before us, with all the distinctness of an express promise from Him, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, the prize of our high calling in Christ Jesus, an inheritance with the saints in light. But there is no change in the substance of God's law, whether written in the conscience of man, or in the dif-

ferent portions of His Word. It is an emanation of perfect justice, goodness, and wisdom, and must be, like its Source, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Truth and holiness are unchangeable as the Fountain from which they flow. Under both the old and new covenants the law is summed up in two commandments, "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself.*" And from whatever source a knowledge of God's will was to be drawn, and whatever principles or duties it comprised, it was to be fixed in the believer's heart. Then, and then only, did the knowledge of it become religion. The heart has always been, and must always be, the seat and shrine of true religion; that is the throne on which it sits, and from thence issues its supreme decrees. If not there, it is nowhere; it has no existence. A man may firmly believe the being of God; may entertain no doubt of His power, His omniscience, His justice; may even believe that God sent His Son into the world to redeem the world: yet this will not be religion. This knowledge must become feeling. From the head it must be transferred to the heart, from which all moral good and evil proceed, and then it will be religious principle: then it will do the work of religion; not before. "*I delight,*" says the Psalmist, speaking in the character of Him who was the Type of God's true children, the First-

born amongst many brethren, "*I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart.*"¹ "*I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts,*"² was the prophetic description of Christ's people. "*With the heart,*" says St. Paul, "*man believeth unto righteousness.*"³

The heart, which is the seat of feeling, is the spirit and soul of man as a religious being; the fountain of thought and the spring of action. It sees in the eyes and hears in the ears. It wills and desires; loves and hates; and "*out of it are the issues of life.*" And, therefore, to place the law of God in the heart, is to place it where alone it can influence the whole moral agent, his thoughts, and wishes, and conversation, and actions. It is to impart a pure and salubrious quality to the stream at its fountain-head. But it is not the mere hearing or reading of God's law which will fix it in the heart. Too often it finds its way no farther than the understanding; sometimes not even so far as that. Many a sublime passage of Holy Writ, many a Scriptural discourse, is listened to with interest, and relished as an intellectual repast, and is thought of no more. Or perhaps the feelings are slightly touched; but the impression soon wears out in daily intercourse with the world; the Word never reaches the ground of the heart.

¹ Psalm xl. 8.

² Jer. xxxi. 33.

³ Romans x. 10.

It falls upon the rocks, and for lack of moisture withereth away. "*Take heed,*" therefore, "*how ye hear;*" not only with attentive ears, but with a heart laid open to the wondrous things of God's law, and longing to be satisfied with them; desiring to be not only pleased or instructed, but improved; to grow not only in knowledge, but in grace; to be more intimately, and deeply, and practically acquainted with the law of God as converting the soul; to be renewed in the inner man by the Holy Spirit, blessing His own Word of truth in answer to prayer. I say, in answer to prayer: for be it remembered that the Word of God will never be heard, nor studied with effect, nor be fixed in the heart as a Word of patience and consolation, if it be not made a subject of earnest prayer. "*O that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes. Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law.*"¹

Of that servant of God, in whose heart his Master's law is fixed, as the one paramount rule of action, clearly discerned by his reason, and cordially embraced by his affections, and mingling itself with the ordinary current of his thoughts, it may with truth be said, that "*none of his steps shall slide.*" He possesses the principle of firmness and security, a rule which cannot deceive, a support which cannot fail; a rule,

¹ Psalm cxix. 5, 18.

moreover, which is not only infallible, but always at hand. By habitual attention to its leadings, he has acquired a readiness in applying it to its proper purpose whenever the necessity occurs. In the busiest scenes of life it is clearly discernible, and instantaneously present to his thoughts; while to the wicked, "*the judgments*" of the Lord "*are far above out of his sight.*"

"*None of his steps shall slide.*" The Psalmist could not intend to say, even of the righteous, that he should suffer no lapse at all, be guilty of no transgression; for he asks, with justice, "*Who can tell how oft he offendeth?*" But what he did intend to say is this: that when once a true principle of religious obedience, a steady regard to the known will of God, is fixed in the heart, there will be no very serious nor fatal deflection from the path of duty, no failure which will not be quickly recovered and made good by penitence and faith. The heart which is possessed and governed by God's holy law is a safe monitor and guide in every circumstance of life. The indwelling of that law insures a conformity of all the habitual thoughts and desires of the soul to the divine will. The current is set in the right direction; all the moral tendencies bend towards their proper centre. The whole inward frame and posture of the mind stands right; and by the unfailing aid of the Holy Spirit, who loves to dwell in such

a heart, it is preserved unblameable in holiness. The law of God in the heart is coincident with, and in part the cause of, the life of God in the soul. It is the instrument whereby the Spirit of God works out the soul's renewal; and, as the apostle says, forms Christ within it. Such was the spiritual character of those holy men who are spoken of in Scripture as having "*walked with God.*" They walked as humble and dutiful attendants upon an Almighty and All-seeing Friend and Master; obedient to the leadings of His Spirit and the precepts of His Word; leaning upon Him for defence and protection; in simplicity and singleness of heart loving and fearing God.

It is with good reason then that our Church, at this beginning of the Christian year,¹ while she reminds us of the great truth declared by St. Paul, that "*whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope,*"² directs us to pray to Him, "who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, to grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of His holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of

¹ This Sermon was written for the Second Sunday in Advent.

² Romans xv. 4.

“everlasting life which He has given us in our “Saviour Jesus Christ.” This is in fact to pray, that the law of God may be in our hearts ; which will be the case with those who hear and read, not casually nor heedlessly, but habitually and thoughtfully, marking well its precepts and promises, and digesting them by serious meditation upon their import and consequence, and finding therein the secret of patience, the source of comfort, and the sure ground of hope, even the hope of eternal life.

I desire you now to consider, when you join in this prayer, whether you are taking any steps to realize it in your own persons ; whether you deal with the Word of God as the most precious of your possessions, as your treasure-house of patience, and consolation, and hope. No language is too strong to represent the inconsistency of those persons who hope to be saved by means of a religion, of which the institutes are contained, entirely and exclusively contained, in the Bible, and who yet never read that Bible, or at most take it in hand only now and then, for the purpose of a cursory and impatient perusal. No language, we say, can be too strong : none can well be stronger than that in which this inconsistency is condemned in the Homilies of our Church, gloriously contrasted in this respect with the Church from which she separated at the Reformation ; one of whose worst abuses

certainly was her denial to the people of the Holy Scriptures in their vernacular tongue. "How," they ask, "can any man say that he "professeth Christ and His religion, if he will "not apply himself to read, and hear, and so to "know the books of Christ's Gospel and doctrine? Although other sciences be good, and "to be learned, yet no man can deny that this is "the chief, and passeth all other incomparably. "What excuse therefore shall we make, at the "last day before Christ, that delight to hear "or read man's fantasies and inventions, more "than His most holy Gospel, and will find no "time to do that, which chiefly above all things "we should do, and will rather read other things "than that, for the which we ought rather to "leave reading of all other things?"¹ A neglected Bible is no doubtful sign of an unsanctified heart. Our Saviour prayed for His followers, "*Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth.*"² It is not possible for us to love God, as He requires us to love Him, and yet to neglect that Word, which alone reveals Him to us as He is; alone discloses the way by which He comes into direct communion with us, and condescends to pardon us, to love us, and to guide us through all the stages of our mysterious being. And yet is it not too true that the Bible is neglected

¹ Second Part of the Homily on Reading of Holy Scripture.

² St. John xvii. 17.

(or at least very inadequately prized, and very carelessly and unprofitably used) by many who profess to believe that it is the Word of God? Go into the apartment of the votary of fashion, the politician, the man of business, each of whom, as destined to live for ever, and as walking in the light of Gospel truth, ought to be a man of God. There you will probably see, strewn around in all the profusion of intellectual luxury, the results of scientific research, the artillery of acrimonious controversy, the fictions of creative fancy, the unhallowed trophies of perverted genius, but no Bible; the fantasies and devices of man, but not the Word of God; the perishable offspring of human intellect, the miserable code of secular expediency or honour, the most approved methods of gain; but not the eternal records of truth, truth without admixture of error, nor the perfect law of liberty and life. Yet the person who so provides for the nourishment of his inner life and the purification of his heart, professes to take the Scriptures for the rule of his conduct, and the ground of his hope: and perhaps in some corner of his shelves, or in his children's school-room, a Bible may be found. For himself he thinks it enough, if upon Sundays at church he hears the lessons read, and then, as may be expected, without any earnest heed to their meaning, or practical application of them to himself.

If ever there was a time when it was the duty of God's ministers to urge upon the consciences of His people the duty and the blessedness of studying and meditating upon His Word, as the source of truth, the fountain of comfort, and the firm foundation of hope, it is surely the present, when the march of the human intellect tends to the unsettling of opinions which have influenced and comforted the wise and good of past generations; when the minds of so many are afloat in a sea of doubt, and their reason is agitated by a tempest of conflicting opinions, drifting between the quicksands of infidelity and the gulf of popery, between the denial of God's truth and the belief of a lying spirit.

At such a time it is more than ever the duty of those who are set on the watch-towers of our Sion, to lift up a warning voice, and to remind those, over whose souls they are appointed to watch, that "*all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,*" and that in the Bible, and in the Church, which draws all its doctrines and ordinances from the Bible, they have still one sure place of refuge, one hiding-place from the storm, one rock of truth whereon they may build their hope of a blessed immortality, one straight infallible rule, whereby to shape their course of life, without fear of error or mischance.

My brethren, it is a vital question to every one of us: Is the law of God in our hearts? Is it

fixed there by the sure fastenings of faith and love, its holdings continually strengthened by prayer and communing with God? Is the law, thus engrafted in our hearts, experienced to be a perfect law of liberty, setting us free from slavery to the world's opinions, fashions, pleasures, and rewards? Be it remembered that the law of God can be fixed in the heart only by the Lawgiver Himself. And He has promised to do it: "*I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.*"¹ It is the work of the Holy Spirit. An honest desire to learn and do God's will, a deep sense of our natural weakness and ignorance, a heartfelt persuasion that whatever we possess or desire of good, must be the free gift of a merciful God, reconciled to us by the mediation of His Incarnate Son, will lead us to prayer, and to a faithful use of those ordinances which are the appointed channels of grace; and prayer, when it is indeed prayer, prayer from the heart, will bring down those gracious influences which will form Christ within us, and write in our hearts not only the law of God, but His very image and similitude.

In the strength and confidence of that law, as the only sure oracle of truth and guide of life, and in daily communings with Him who gave it, we may plant our footsteps in the most rugged or slippery of those paths, along which our pil-

¹ Jeremiah xxxi. 33.

grimage may be directed by the providence of God, and none of them shall slide. We shall walk heedfully in the midst of temptation, firmly and uprightly in the time of tribulation or of wealth; and shall find it to be a rod of support and a staff of comfort through the valley of the shadow of death.

SERMON XIII.

THE LEAVEN OF UNBELIEF AND HYPOCRISY.

MATTHEW XVI. 6.

Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

THE unbelieving world may be divided into three classes of people; those whose hearts are closed against Gospel truth by an opinion of self-righteousness and sufficiency; those whose consciences are deadened by habitual sin, leading to a determined rejection of God's truth; and those who care for none of these things, but live an unconcerned and thoughtless life, and move on with the stream of human affairs, never so much as considering whither it will carry them. The two first of these classes are the legitimate representatives of those Jewish sects or persuasions, against whom our Saviour cautions His disciples in the text, whom both He and His forerunner designated as a "*generation of vipers*," and whom on all occasions He rebuked with the language of severe displeasure and contempt. The Pharisees were professed believers in the law of Moses; but they had corrupted

it by their traditions, and made the Word of God of none effect as a rule and help of spiritual holiness. The principal cause, however, of their obstinate rejection of the Gospel, was an overweening opinion of their own spiritual capacity and goodness. They accounted themselves righteous in the sight of God, and claimed a reward from His justice, on the score of their own deservings, notwithstanding the many declarations of their Scriptures, which proclaimed the sinfulness of human nature, and the unprofitableness of man to God. That a Saviour was promised to Israel they knew and acknowledged; but they were not prepared to receive any Saviour, whose appearance and pretensions did not accord with their own notions, grounded upon a partial and forced interpretation of Scripture. They therefore, "*rejected the counsel of God.*" The consequence of their mistaken notions of religion was hypocrisy. They placed the essence of godliness in outward form and profession, but took no care to purify the mind and affections, and to present unto God the sacrifice of a broken and a contrite heart. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were unbelievers from a very different cause. They denied the resurrection of the dead: they were therefore, practically at least, atheists; they had no tie upon their conscience; no encouragement to a virtuous life; and, accordingly, they were a very immoral and

profane body of men, and yet observant of the outward forms of religion, and engaged in the performance of its most solemn ordinances; for we learn from the Acts of the Apostles that many of the priests, and at one time even the High Priest himself, were Sadducees. They were opposed to the Pharisees, as atheism is opposed to formality and superstition, but not more friendly to the pure and strict religion of Jesus than the Pharisees were. The two parties afforded a memorable instance of the manner and degree in which reason is warped, and the understanding perverted, as well by passion as by prejudice; by the sinful lusts of the flesh, or by the pride of a deceitful heart.

It was just after our Saviour had miraculously fed more than four thousand persons with a few loaves and fishes, that “*the Pharisees with the Sadducees came, and, tempting, desired Him that He would shew them a sign from heaven:*”¹ that is, that He would command some supernatural appearance, some glorious light, or perhaps, some celestial voice, to bear undeniable testimony to His divine character, and to remove all their doubts. It is not improbable, that they had heard some report of the declaration of John the Baptist, who bare record of Jesus, saying, “*I saw the Spirit descending from heaven, like a dove, and it abode upon Him;*”² and that

¹ St. Matthew xvi. 1.

² St. John i. 32.

they were desirous, if indeed they desired to be convinced at all, of having some such ocular demonstration themselves. This is always the way with unbelievers; they choose to have their own proofs, and reject the proofs which God is pleased to offer them. Thus one man may erect for himself one standard of testimony, and another, another, according to the peculiar opinions which he may chance to entertain of the right method of God's dealing with mankind. Thus amongst the Jews, although none called in question the reality of our Saviour's miracles, some would not receive His doctrine, because He was a Galilean, and "*out of Galilee ariseth no prophet*;"¹ some contended that miracles were no proof of His divine commission, for that He wrought them by the assistance of Beelzebub, the prince of the devils; while another class, for want of a better reason, refused to acknowledge His authority, because none "*of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on Him*."² And the Pharisees and Sadducees themselves, after having witnessed the most surprising displays of supernatural power, exerted in works of benevolence and charity, remained wholly unmoved, and again and again demanded a sign from heaven. So it had been with their forefathers in the wilderness, who required miracle upon miracle to fix their belief in the protecting

¹ St. John vii. 52.² Ibid. vii. 48.

providence of God. After Moses had smitten the rock, and supplied the fainting multitude with water, they exclaimed, "*Behold, he smote the rock that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can He give bread also? can He provide flesh for His people?*"¹

With regard to the marks of a genuine revelation from heaven, it is plain, that if God has given sufficient evidence of it, no man has a right to demand more. Jesus had wrought many undoubted miracles; this He could only have done, according to the Jewish notions, by the power of God, or by the assistance of the spirit of evil. Now, that the prince of darkness had no part in those wonderful works must have been evident, even to the Jews; for they were done to destroy his own power. With this unanswerable argument our Lord Himself silenced the gainsayers, when they imputed to Him that He was in league with Beelzebub. "*If Satan be divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? because ye say that I cast out devils through Beelzebub.*"² No other conclusion then remained, but that His miracles were performed by the power of God resting upon Him; and it was therefore without any reason that they demanded of Him a sign from heaven. Instead of complying with their demand, our Saviour rebuked them for their hypocrisy; and

¹ Psalm lxxviii. 20.

² St. Luke xi. 18.

told them, that they could discern the face of the sky, and predict changes of the weather from the customary appearances of nature, however uncertain ; and the same common sense and judgment which enabled them to do so, ought to make them perceive, by the indubitable signs which He exhibited, that the times of the Messiah were come. Our Lord refused a sign from heaven, partly because their obstinate incredulity did not deserve that any further means of conviction should be employed ; and partly because He well knew, that not even that sign from heaven would have caused them to believe. A heart, hardened by pride, hypocrisy, or vice, is proof against all the light and strength of moral demonstration. Almighty God has attested the revelation of His will to man, with a variety of evidence, abundantly sufficient to convince every humble, sincere, unprejudiced mind. They who reject it, do so, for the most part, not because the evidence which is offered to them is insufficient, but because no evidence whatever would have induced them to believe. “ *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*”¹ Such persons ought not to talk so loudly of their love of truth, and their willingness to be convinced of the authority of the Gospel. It is said, indeed, that men are masters

¹ St. Luke xvi. 31.

of their belief ; that some persons desire to believe and are not able ; and that such are to be pitied, not blamed. To be pitied, indeed, they are ; and so are all who reject the Word or disobey the laws of God ; and one sinner must be careful how he condemns another. We do not admit it to be possible that any man who prays in all sincerity and meekness, and singleness of heart, to be enlightened as to the truth of the Gospel, can long continue an unbeliever. But supposing it to be otherwise, such instances are, at all events, exceedingly rare ; for the most part it may be said of unbelievers, that their objection is not to the nature of the evidence by which the truth of the Gospel is proved ; but to the Gospel itself ; which they will sometimes tell you plainly, no testimony whatever could render credible. And why ? Because, if the truth be spoken, nothing can render its doctrines and its duties palatable to them. This was the case with the Pharisees ; and this is hypocrisy. Of this leaven our Saviour bids His disciples beware. Nay, even amongst some of those who profess to embrace the Gospel, something of the same spirit is too perceptible. There are those who call themselves Christians ; and yet in arguing against certain doctrines which are contained in Scripture, they declare that if it could be proved to their apprehension that the doctrines are really there, they would forthwith reject the

Scriptures themselves as untrue. Is this to deal respectfully with a revelation from God? Is this the temper of mind in which we are to receive the engrafted Word which is able to save our souls? Are we to approach with the language of presumptuous claimants the footstool of that Omniscient Being, who formed us out of the dust, and endued us with a limited intelligence, suited to this state of discipline? Are we to invade the secrecy of His tabernacle, and demand that any revelation which He may vouchsafe to us of His nature and will, shall be in all respects agreeable to our notions of what it ought to be, and to refuse and disown it, if it correspond not in every particular with our own standard? Yet such is the spirit of those, who, without altogether rejecting the Christian revelation, embrace it only so far as they deem it to be reasonable, that is, consistent with their own reason. Such was the spirit of the Pharisees, who rejected Christ, because He was a very different kind of person from the Messiah whom they had taught themselves to expect; not choosing to abide by the plain letter of Scripture, nor to acknowledge the distinct fulfilment of prophecy, nor to accept the evidence even of miracles. Mistaken men! who refuse to acknowledge Jesus for your only Saviour, and to rest your hopes of pardon on His atoning sacrifice; what is the testimony which you expect? Must it

be a sign from heaven? Must you see inscribed upon the canopy of the sky, in characters of glory, the titles of Redeemer, the Only-begotten Son, the Lamb of God? What! are they not already written as with a sunbeam in every page of the Gospel? Must a new language be devised to express in stronger terms the exalted nature of the Saviour of mankind, the worthiness of His obedience, the atoning efficacy of His death? How shall the Holy Spirit speak more plainly to these points than He has already spoken? Oh "*beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*"

The Pharisees erected human traditions into a law, to the disparagement of Holy Scripture; so did, afterwards, the Christians of the Romish Church; in the one case this error led to incredulity, in the other to superstition. But now human reason must be exalted into the seat of judgment, and pretends not merely to determine whether the evidences of revelation be satisfactory or not (for that is reason's legitimate province), but, taking revelation as true, to decide upon the credibility of its doctrines; a strange and fatal abuse of reason, and a remnant of the true Pharisaical leaven.

But we fear that it is the leaven of the Sadducees which exerts the most corrupting influence over the human mind, and most effectually indisposes it for the reception of divine

truth. Immoral conduct, if it be not the consequence, is generally the preparation for unbelief. The eternal and immutable law of morality, ineffectual as it is to control the passions, or to regulate the actions of mankind, yet speaks intelligibly by the conscience of every man, and exerts a certain degree of authority, antecedently to the knowledge of a direct revelation from on high. The impure and the dishonest know that they are offending, even if they are unacquainted with the positive prohibitions of the Law and the Gospel; "*that which may be known of God, is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.*"¹ Yet the knowledge which they possess of the nature and extent of their guilt, is imperfect and obscure; the voice of conscience is a still small voice, and soon ceases to be heard amidst the tumult of pleasure. Such persons, then, are naturally and inevitably prejudiced against revealed religion; they are averse from that which establishes, beyond dispute, the great duties of morality, and places their own guilt and danger in the clearest light. The Gospel is a mirror in which they read their own character and destination; and therefore it is difficult indeed to persuade them of its truth. The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead. Why? because they knew that if it were

¹ Romans i. 19.

to be at all, it must be a resurrection to judgment. How unwilling must the adulterer, the fornicator, or the covetous be, to admit the truth and authority of a law which consigns the unclean to everlasting destruction, and condemns covetousness as idolatry! I say nothing of the pernicious influence of immorality upon the intellectual character. No man can be ignorant in how great a degree a course of vicious indulgences debases and weakens the faculties of the mind, obscures the eye of reason, and at once disinclines and disqualifies a man for inquiries after truth. The pride of human reason is no doubt opposed, in a fatal degree, both to the simplicity and the sublimity of the Gospel; but the great source of unbelief is ungodliness, and, I am afraid, a far more abundant source than mere intellectual pride; for it operates in a far greater variety of ways. It not only prevents men from embracing Christianity in the first instance, but it is the great cause and occasion of subsequent apostasy; for many, "*after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, are again entangled therein, and overcome;*" and "*the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.*"¹ I speak not merely of the avowed infidel; not merely of him who openly scoffs

¹ 2 St. Peter ii. 20.

at religion, and sets his Maker at defiance; but of many who are Christians in externals, but unbelievers at heart. I say at heart, for if faith be not there, it is nowhere; if a man believe not the Gospel in his heart, he is in effect an infidel. Many a person is baptized into the Church of Christ, continues in the profession of His faith, observes the customary ordinances of religion; ask him why? and he will tell you, because he believes Christianity to be the true religion. The same person commits some act contrary to the purity and strictness of the Gospel; he is revengeful, or uncharitable, profane in his speech, or worldly and frivolous in his pursuits; and why? why, but because he does not in fact believe the great doctrines of the religion which he professes. Would he act as he does, if he were thoroughly convinced in his heart, that the welfare of the soul is the one thing needful; that the promises and the threats of the Gospel will infallibly be fulfilled; that “*nothing can enter into*” the holy city “*that defileth* ;”¹ that Christ will judge him for every unholy deed and thought, and for every idle word; and that it is only by a heartfelt faith in Christ, by a prevailing and constraining love of Him, by the most strenuous and persevering efforts to be holy even as He is holy, that he can make his calling and election sure?

¹ Revelation xxi. 27.

No; it is impossible that he should believe all this; at least, that he should believe it in his heart. He will not perhaps deny it in words; he is not prepared with arguments to combat any of these truths, but he does not feel them; he does not dwell upon them; that is, in point of fact, he does not believe them; for if he did, it is morally impossible that his conduct should be what it is. This may appear to be strong language; but it is not so strong as that of the apostle: "*He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*"¹ This is true hypocrisy; this is the true leaven both of the Pharisees and Sadducees: of this, my brethren, beware; "*take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*"² The progress from superficial, uncertain faith, to infidelity, is easily achieved. Possessed with a general and indefinite belief in the Gospel, but not intimately acquainted with its requirements or its privileges, his faith not strengthened and rooted in the heart by prayer, the unsteady Christian yields to the temptations of the flesh, or devotes himself to the pursuit of some worldly object of desire; from that moment he begins to think less seriously of his Gospel duties, and gradually to relax the ties by which his conscience is bound; he is awake to every

¹ 1 St. John ii. 4.

² Hebrews iii. 12.

argument which may tend to remove his scruples and fears, by depreciating the authority of religion; he is willing enough to accept insinuation for proof; and to imbibe objections, without inquiring how they may be answered. He listens to profane and sceptical conversation; and mixes in it himself, at first perhaps without any settled disbelief, but at length as one enrolled in the ranks of infidelity. It is thus that vicious and irreligious habits of every kind, which in the first instance proceed from the want of a fixed principle of piety, exert a reflex influence upon the heart, and by degrees confirm it in practical unbelief and even atheism. *“If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”*¹

Let me earnestly advise you, then, and particularly my younger Christian brethren, never seek to palliate any sin into which the weakness of your nature may have betrayed you; nor to elude the reproaches of conscience by attempting either to weaken the force of the Gospel prohibitions, or to invalidate the evidence upon which the Gospel itself demands your assent. Your passions are already bribed as

¹ 2 Corinthians iv. 3, 4.

advocates in the cause of unbelief, and unfit you for the office of a judge. To those who would persuade you to underrate the guilt of sin, and the authority of that revelation which proscribes it, let your answer always be, God hath spoken, and shall He not do it? The ungodly "*shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal*" through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord. Particularly let me entreat you never to indulge yourselves, nor to tolerate in others, the practice of speaking irreverently or jestingly of anything relating to God's most holy Name, His word, His ordinances; nor even of the errors and follies of enthusiasm and superstition. Free-speaking is almost sure to lead to free-thinking; and he who begins with jesting at religion, commonly ends with reviling it. Further, you will do well to avoid disputing about the more obscure truths of religion, lest it should throw you into an unsettled state of mind, and at length unfix your belief in Christianity itself. The great doctrines of the Gospel are so plain, so convincing, so consolatory, so sufficient to guide your practice here, and to satisfy all your hopes of an hereafter, that you ought to embrace them cordially and without reserve, and to rest contented and settled in the assurance, that a true faith in Jesus Christ, manifesting itself in the fruits of obedience, will ensure to you the rewards of eternity. To the

main doctrines of the Gospel—the atonement made for sinners; the indispensableness of a charitable, serious, holy life; the necessity of divine grace, and the certainty of obtaining it; the resurrection to eternal life; the judgment of all men according to their work—to these truths adhere; dwell upon them; fix the remembrance of them in your minds; study well the Scriptures which declare them; these are the truths which most concern the soul; “*but foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.*”¹

Lastly, my brethren, beware of a proud and lofty spirit: this also was the leaven both of Pharisee and Sadducee. Religion requires an implicit and unreserved submission, both of heart and mind, to God. It requires a just, that is, a very humble opinion of our own infirmity and imperfection, both in understanding and moral power. Without this, there can be no true vital religion. “*Learn of Me,*” said our blessed Saviour, “*for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.*” Observe when it is that religion most triumphantly asserts its prerogative, and obtains the most complete possession of the heart; it is in the season of trouble and affliction, when it is bruised by the heavy hand of God; when it is made to feel its own weakness and unworthiness.

¹ 2 Timothy ii. 23.

God dwells with the humble and contrite spirit; notes down the tears of the penitent; hears all the sighings of the broken heart; "*revives the spirit of the humble,*" but "*beholdeth the proud afar off.*" Beware, then, of thinking highly of your own knowledge or virtue; never permit yourselves to believe that you are righteous enough, nor rest satisfied with your present state of spiritual improvement; but when you have done all, confess that it is nothing, and say, "We are unprofitable servants." The true Christian can assure you, from experience, that by thus humbling your soul, you will give it its true elevation; it is thus strengthened by the sense of its own weakness; and by rejecting a misplaced confidence in its own powers and deservings, it removes the very groundwork and source of unbelief.

Let us pray to the Giver of light and grace, that He may be pleased to bring all hearts into subjection to the Gospel of His blessed Son; that all self-righteousness may be beaten down; all hypocrisy, all false and formal religion may be laid aside, all carelessness shaken off, all coldness of heart melted by His grace, that we may be fervent in spirit, and "*sincere, and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.*"¹

¹ Philippians i. 10, 11.

SERMON XIV.

VICTORY OVER TEMPTATION.

1 CORINTHIANS X. 13.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man : but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

THIS assurance, with which the Apostle seeks to console his Corinthian brethren under their trials, contains the assertion of two most important truths, in which we are as nearly concerned as they were ; firstly, that all men are exposed to temptations ; and, secondly, that there is no temptation which may not be successfully resisted by the servant of God. The subject of temptation is one of great difficulty, and, to him who is not established in the faith, of great perplexity. Looking only to the conclusions of our own natural reason, unenlightened by direct revelation, we should find it

difficult to reconcile the notion of permitted temptation with the Divine attributes of justice and goodness. But when we take for our guide the unerring Word of God, the only trustworthy source of information on all questions concerning His dealings with men, we perceive that temptation is a necessary part of the system of moral discipline, which is intended to prepare us for a higher state of existence; we are brought to understand its reality and its objects; although, in its mode, it still surpasses our comprehension.

The difficulty which surrounds the Scripture doctrine of temptations, is in truth the same as that which is presented to the inquirer after truth by the existence of evil. The fact is unquestionable: its mode, and the reasons of it, depend entirely upon the Divine decrees, and are amongst those "*secret things which belong to the Lord our God.*"¹ If indeed the evil, which is permitted to exist in the moral system of the Divine government, were perpetual in its duration, and extended in every instance in its baneful consequences to the final issues of things; if, for instance, there were some temptations absolutely irresistible, and men were under an inevitable necessity of committing a deadly sin, we should find it difficult cordially to embrace a doctrine, so opposite to

¹ Deuteronomy xxix. 29.

those notions of the Divine attributes which we derive from both reason and revelation; although, strange to say, there are many Christians, who not only admit such a doctrine, but delight in it, as specially illustrating the glory of God. Such, however, we are persuaded, is not the real doctrine of our blessed Saviour, nor of His apostles, who, while they proclaim the existence and power of evil, the universality of sin, and the strength of temptation, offer freely to all who are willing and prepared to receive them, an all-sufficient antidote, and a sovereign remedy; and declare to all such, that sin, although it may vex and harass them, shall not have dominion over them; that, if they are tempted, as, in common with all men, they must expect to be, “*God will not suffer them to be tempted above that they are able; but will with the temptation also make a way for them to escape;*” or, to sum up the entire Christian doctrine in the simple words of the Divine Author of Christianity, He will “*not lead them into temptation,*” but will “*deliver them from evil.*”

The question, why does God permit man to be tempted to a disregard of His will and a transgression of His law, is a fruitless, as well as presumptuous, inquiry into the Divine counsels. We know that “*every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh*

*“down from the Father of lights, with whom
“is no variableness neither shadow of turning;”*¹
we know that when He surveyed the work of creation as it first rose into order at His command, He pronounced it to be *“very good.”* And yet we are too well assured of the present existence of evil in that very system; and that it must exist by His permission, and for the purpose of final good. Much of that good is in fact discernible to us; enough to create a reasonable persuasion, raised to certainty by the testimony of God’s Word, that all things *“work together for good to them that love God.”*² To ask the reason of that constitution, which the Supreme Law-giver has established for the government of His moral creation, is as presumptuous as it would be to inquire, why every man was not made an angel, or every star a sun.

The notion of a state of trial implies the existence of temptation. There could be no proof of obedience to the will of God without some difficulty in the performance of our duty, either by reason of powerful incitements to evil from without, or of perverse inclinations from within. But the notion of trial implies also the possibility, in every case, of resisting it; for that would be no trial in which success was impossible and failure certain; and, there-

¹ St. James i. 17.

² Romans viii. 28.

fore, the apostles speak of temptation as being in itself evil, but an instrument of greater good. "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.*"¹ Temptation is, therefore, "*common to man;*" and that it should be so, is no imputation upon the justice or goodness of God. It is incident to the state of probation in which He has seen fit to place us; a necessary part of the preliminary discipline by which He desires to qualify us for admission into that kingdom which has been purchased for us by His dear Son, the glories of which will far more than compensate us for the lost joys of paradise, and where our happiness may possibly be enhanced by the remembrance of temptations resisted and overcome; as the repose, which awaits the weary pilgrim at the end of his journey, is rendered sweeter and more refreshing by the recollection of all the obstacles which he has surmounted and all the dangers he has escaped. Whatever obscurity may hang over the question, why does God permit men to be tempted to sin, and so to incur the risk of eternal death; which is, in fact, equivalent to the question, why is man placed in a state of trial; all practical difficulty is removed from the believer's mind by the

¹ St. James i. 12.

assurance, that God "*will not suffer*" him "*to be tempted above that*" he is "*able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape.*"

Let us understand the word temptation in its most general sense, as signifying any trial that may overcome or hurt us, whether the suggestions of a spirit of evil, the strong allurements of the world or the flesh, or persecutions and heavy sufferings which may draw us into sin, or impair or destroy our faith and trust in God. It is against all these varieties of trial that we implore the Divine protection, when we pray to God that He will not lead us into temptation. He has placed us in this world in the midst of temptations, and has made it a chief part of our duty to withstand and overcome them. He permits the adversary of men's souls to suggest evil thoughts and deeds, and to call in to his aid the world and the flesh, enemies of Christ and of our salvation, against whom we are pledged by our baptismal vows to wage unceasing warfare; He tries us Himself by manifold afflictions, and by exposing us to the enmity of persecutors and oppressors: but He does not tempt men to sin. That is not His intention or desire. Satan tempts them to sin; God tries them, whether they will yield to that temptation, which He would not have them do; or whether they will be faithful to Him, which He will enable them to be; and to conquer in the strength

of His grace. “*Let no man,*” says St. James, “*say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil; neither tempteth He any man: but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*”¹ God, therefore, does not tempt men to sin: He exposes them to temptation, or suffers them to be tried, in order, not that they may sin, but that they may not sin; the end of temptation being this, to prove the strength of their faith, and the power of Divine grace. It is impossible to conceive of God, that He should tempt any man with the design of seducing him to sin. This is the special and peculiar work of the devil, and of the devil’s servants amongst men. Our Heavenly Father disciplines His children for their good, proves their love and obedience by suffering them to fall into divers temptations for the trial of their faith. He permits evil men to be assailed with severe temptations, and as a just punishment for past obstinacy and neglect of grace and privilege, He may withhold from them the assistance which is readily given to those who desire and seek it; yet even they may obtain it as long as the day of salvation lasteth; but the utmost that He does, is to leave incorrigible sinners to themselves. In all cases His design in ordaining or permitting His servants to be tempted, is to make

¹ St. James i. 13, 14.

them better, and therefore in the end happier, than they would have been, if never tempted at all. It depends upon themselves whether such shall be the issue. It is not necessary to point out the various ways in which temptation exercises the virtues of men, and improves their spiritual state. St. James speaks of it as a subject of joy, when good men are tried with afflictions, not because afflictions are in themselves desirable, but because their results, when they are endured with a Christian spirit and temper, are an improved state of the heart and affections, and an increased meetness for glory: "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience:*"¹ and St. Paul, "*We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience*" (or the *proof* of a man's faith); "*and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed.*"²

What a blessed assurance to the children of God are those words of the text, "*God will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.*" He will either proportion the temptation to our strength, or He will increase our strength in proportion to the temptation. If it be true that no temptation takes us but what is common to man, it is not less certain that none can happen to us which is not known to and provided for

¹ St. James i. 2, 3.

² Romans v. 3, 4, 5.

by God. Were it not for His providence continually watching over us, and His Spirit dwelling in us, we should hardly be able to resist any temptation, certainly not those which come upon us suddenly and with violence. An habitual remembrance of God's presence, and a steadfast trust in His goodness and power, prevent us from being taken by surprise, because that presence and power are realized at such moments to him who believes in them, and reposes in that belief. If for unseen purposes of mercy our Heavenly Father permits His servants to be exposed to trials of more than ordinary sharpness, beyond the power of mere human endurance, He ministers from the treasures of His grace strength and support proportioned to the force of the temptation. His "*strength is made perfect in weakness.*"¹ What power, but that of God Himself, could have enabled the first-born children of the Church to endure a great fight of afflictions not only with patience, but with gladness; to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods; to rejoice and be exceeding glad when men reviled them, and persecuted them, and said all manner of evil against them falsely for Christ's sake; to smile at all the terrors of the most fearful death; to praise God with the accents of joy, even in the extremity of torture; and to breathe out their spirit in jubilant psalms of thanksgiving while

¹ 2 Corinthians xii. 9.

their bodies were slowly consumed in the flames? Nor was this intervention of God's preserving and supporting grace manifested only in the case of the primitive Christians; but it has been conspicuously displayed in later ages, when the exigencies of the Church required it. The noble army of martyrs, from holy Stephen down to the latest victims of antichristian or unchristian persecution, form a cloud of witnesses, who bear evidence to its reality. Nor is it less real, though it be less conspicuous, in the case of all those faithful servants of God, who are beset by sore temptations, which, though not requiring a resistance unto blood, are yet too sharp to be successfully withstood by the strength of natural reason and conscience, unaided by the special grace of God. It is true, in every instance, that He permits no man to be tempted above that he is able to bear, either in virtue of his habitual faith, and the constitution of a well-trained mind and conscience, or of strength imparted for the particular emergency in answer to prayer.

But it will perhaps be said, in answer to this, Would indeed that it were so; but alas! we do not find it to be so in fact. We are often tempted above that we are able; and our best endeavours to withstand the temptation are unsuccessful. We reply, that you are able, that is, you have the ability, if you will use and improve it, to resist temptation; and that the endeavours which

you use, are not really and indeed your best endeavours. That you have the ability to withstand ordinary temptations appears from this consideration, that there is no one temptation, by which you are habitually overcome, which you could not resist successfully under the impulse of a sufficiently powerful motive of personal interest. If you knew certainly that instant death would follow upon any act of unlawful indulgence, you would undoubtedly forbear from it. With many sinners the imminent risk of death, or even of pain, is a sufficient inducement to them to abstain; we see this exemplified every day in the case of those who are living according to the rules prescribed by their physician: so that ordinary temptations may be overcome by those who will observe the ordinary rules and reasons of prudence and interest. And till we have done this, we cannot judge how far we may be able to carry a successful resistance to temptation, because to those who will not use the strength they have, God will surely not impart that which they have not. By our incorporation into the mystical body of Christ, we become entitled to the grace which He purchased for us, and receive such a measure of it, as to enable us, if duly improved, to seek for and obtain more; even as much as is requisite for every possible contingency of our spiritual life. God gives His Holy Spirit to

them that ask Him ; and it is in every man's power to ask ; difficult as it may be, and the result of much thought, and self-inquiry, and study of the Scripture, and previous prayer, to be able to "*ask in faith, nothing wavering.*"

But it is vain, and worse than vain, to pray for the help of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us against temptation beforehand, and to give us the victory when the struggle comes on, if we do not use our best endeavours to remove the causes of temptation and to weaken its force, by mortifying our sinful desires and subduing our vicious inclinations by systematic self-denial. If, when the Tempter assails us from without, he finds a man's worst foes those of his own household within, ready to league themselves with him, and to do his bidding, there is small chance of our succeeding against such fearful odds ; nor will it avail us then to invoke, for the first time, the aid of the Holy Spirit, if our hearts have not been prepared beforehand to receive Him. For want of habitual watchfulness, and an unceasing endeavour to establish the mastery over our desires, and to shake off the sin that does most easily beset us, we make no effectual resistance to temptation, but complain that it is too much for the weakness of our nature to bear, when it is altogether our own fault if that weakness, great as it may be, has not been strengthened so as to be proof against the fiercest assaults of

the evil one. So true is the saying of St. James, that "*every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*" So entirely do the promises of spiritual help proceed upon the supposition of our employing all the strength and resources which we actually possess, that a successful resistance to temptation is sometimes spoken of as the result of our own endeavours—" *Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*"¹

In this argument we may find a plain condemnation of that miserable self-delusion by which men persuade themselves that a certain class of offences against the law of God, which they call sins of infirmity, are excusable. If through the infirmity of a man's nature he is sure to fall, it is a reason for his laying eager hold upon the hand of Divine love which is stretched out to uphold and strengthen him; but it is manifestly no excuse for his falling for want of that support, if he neglects to profit by it. No regenerate man, no man in a state of grace, can urge that plea which St. Paul puts into the mouth of one who had not been made a member of Christ's mystical body, "*The evil which I would not, that I do.*"² When we sin, it is not through the weakness of our nature, but for want of grace. Where the spirit is truly willing, though the flesh be ever so weak, yet if we watch and pray, we shall not enter into temptation; or at least a

¹ St. James iv. 7.

² Romans vii. 19.

way will be made for us to escape from it. No sin, however small in itself, or however strong the temptation, if habitually or repeatedly committed, can be properly called a sin of infirmity, a sin which natural infirmity will excuse. Besides its own intrinsic sinfulness, aggravated as it is by a neglect of the means of supernatural strength, it necessarily impairs and weakens the whole moral constitution, and renders the soul less able to resist succeeding and perhaps more dangerous trials of its integrity.

Look well to this, ye who venture within the precincts of forbidden pleasure under a notion that your sin, if any, is but a little one, and that your religious principles will not be seriously impaired. Temptation wins upon the soul by secret and almost insensible gradations. A first acquaintance with sin is by degrees improved into familiarity, the heart's aversion to it is lessened, and at length is changed into love. Our first and most earnest prayer then ought to be, "*Lead us not into temptation.*" Great as is the believer's privilege of asking for grace to support him under all the trials of his faith, when they come upon him, it is a still more blessed thing to be preserved from falling into temptation by God's preventing grace, to which indeed it is to be ascribed that all men are not tempted to the worst sins, and that the world is not a scene of wickedness and disorder.

Let no one imagine that God will make a way for him to escape from those temptations to which he has knowingly exposed himself, under a vain persuasion perhaps that his principles are proof against them; who enters, for instance, into amusements which give occasion to profaneness and immorality in many who partake of them, with an intention of only enjoying them so far as they may be innocently enjoyed, and of tasting the sweets of worldly pleasure without feeling its sting. Whoever tries the strength of principles by such a venture as this, will find that they fail him, that they will be gradually weakened, and at length broken down. Having placed his foot within the magic circle of the world's unholy pleasures, he cannot consistently pray to God not to lead him into temptation, nor reasonably expect that He will deliver him from the evil one. The promises of help from above are not addressed indiscriminately to all who are exposed to temptation, but only to the sincere and earnest, though perhaps weak and imperfect Christians. The words of St. Paul in the text were written to persons, of whom he had before said, "*In every thing ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance and in all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be*

*“blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*¹ And St. Peter’s words are, *“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations;”*² the godly, that is, those who believe in Jesus Christ, and trust in His merits for the pardon of their sins, and lean upon His intercession to give prevailing force to their prayers; those who seek continually for the promised aid of the Spirit to help their infirmities and to protect them from all things which may assault and hurt the soul. This is an important feature of the process by which the godly are delivered from temptation, of the way which is made for them to escape; I mean the intercession of our great High Priest, which at once sets forth the merits of His obedience in arrest of judgment, and unlocks the fountains of Divine grace. Its streams are thus set free, to flow into the believer’s soul, which opens itself for its reception in prayer, and the communion of the body and blood of Christ. We have a special inducement to look to Him for protection against temptation, and for deliverance from it when it cannot be avoided, in the thought that *“in that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.”* We have recourse to a High Priest who can be *“touched with the feeling of our infirmities;”*³ who is moved, as it were, to increased degrees of compassion by a personal

¹ 1 Cor. i. 5—8. ² 2 St. Peter ii. 9. ³ Hebrews ii, 18, & iv. 15.

sympathy with us under our trials. He drank of the same cup, and passed through the same furnace by which the faith of His servants is put to the proof.

But then the great Intercessor pleads only for those who pray for themselves, and trust to Him to present their prayers to the Father, to procure their acceptance for His own sake. No sin of omission more certainly quenches the light of the Spirit, and deadens the soul's best energies, and dims the eye of faith, than the neglect of private prayer. The life of God in the soul can continue no longer than while we maintain habitual communion with Him, and pour out our hearts before Him. If we suffer business, or pleasure, or study, to interrupt these approaches of the soul to God, or to make us careless in performing them, that life will gradually but surely decay, and at last, like a lamp untrimmed and un replenished, will wane and die away. Prayer is the soul's only safety. But we shall not pray as earnestly as we ought to pray for deliverance from temptation, unless we are tremblingly alive to its existence, and to the constant danger in which we are placed. It will not do to reserve our endeavours and prayers for great and critical emergencies ; when temptation approaches us undisguised, and a spiritual conflict is visibly at hand. We must live under a constant sense of its existence, and suspect it even in the most

ordinary circumstances of our daily life, and walk as being surrounded by it on every side. The devil and his angels are at all times walking up and down in the world, "*seeking for dry places,*" mingling in the tumult and hurry of our worldly occupations, and haunting our solitude. The craft of the devil is more to be feared than his open assaults; he knows how to draw poison out of the richest benefits of God's providence, to find some roots of bitterness even in trees of paradise, and to convert even the means of good into the instruments of temptation. A man's worldly business, his food, his clothing, his recreations, nay, even his dearest domestic relations and enjoyments, if not presided over and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, may prove so many snares to him, and may withdraw his affections by degrees from spiritual objects, and unfit him for those spiritual exercises which are the very health and life of his soul.

"*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.*"¹ By careful self-inquiry and study of God's Word, strive to have your "*senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*"² Despise not, nor neglect any of those ordinances which the Church has appointed as distinct opportunities for the soul's recollection and recovery; so many cool and quiet spots by the wayside, to which the Christian may turn from the hurry

¹ Ephesians v. 15.

² Hebrews v. 14.

and heat of his journey, to refresh and renew his spiritual energies. Stir up yourselves before the Lord. Pour out your soul before Him in prayer, and watch thereunto with all perseverance. Try the ground of your heart, bring out from its chambers of imagery every evil thought and wish that is lurking there, and cast it forth with power.

Expect temptation, but do not invite it. Secure yourselves against it in its more formidable shape, by putting away every habit which may lead to a forgetfulness of God. "*Lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset*" you—the more easily from its apparent insignificance; "*and run with patience the race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.*"¹ Take up His cross daily; follow His footsteps through whatever path of tribulation and trial He may see fit to lead you, having respect unto the recompense of the reward; and then, when the sharpest trial of all comes upon you, He will speak to you by His Spirit in words of consolation and promise. "*Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*"²

¹ Heb. xii. 1, 2.

² Rev. iii. 10.

SERMON XV.

CHRISTIAN EXAMPLE.

ST. MATTHEW V. 16.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

It is a common saying, that every man's religion is a matter between God and his own conscience. But although common, it is not a true saying, unless it be understood of religion in the most restricted sense, as a system of belief; and even then it is only so far true, as it is applied to a man's inward convictions and feelings. For when these are openly expressed, and carried out in visible actions, a third party has then an interest in the question of his religion, and that is his neighbour, every one within the sphere of his observation or knowledge: and the interest, which one man has in the religion of another, is measured by the influence which it is calculated to exercise upon his own religious state. This, at least, is eminently true of Christianity; and it is implied in the nature and object of the Gospel dispensation, as it was described at its

very dawn by the angels who welcomed its Divine Author into the world which He came to save; "*Glory to God in the highest.*" The glory of God is the ultimate object of the Gospel; and He has been pleased to declare, that He will be glorified by the salvation of mankind; and although the fulness of His glory in this respect will not be made visible till the consummation of His plans of mercy, "*when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day;*"¹ yet it is evident that the work must be in progress here, and that it is to be carried on by His servants.

But the glory of God will be advanced, in proportion as the Church of Christ is extended, and His Gospel is cordially embraced. It is therefore a part of every Christian's religion, not merely to obey the precepts of that Gospel himself, but to recommend it to the acceptance of others, either by a direct enforcement of its obligations and privileges in the way of instruction, or by exemplifying in his own conduct its divine efficacy as a teacher of holiness, and a guide to tranquillity and peace.

The true Church of Christ is an essentially expansive body, and has an inherent principle of self-diffusion. Every particle acts on those which surround it, and through them upon a larger and continually extending sphere of

¹ 2 Thessalonians i. 10.

objects: a little leaven, hid in two measures of meal, and leavening the whole mass. This principle of expansion results of necessity from the peculiar disclosures, and requirements, and promises of the Gospel. A sinner, turned from the error of his ways, brought to see the true nature of sin, his own unworthiness, and the freeness of God's mercies in Christ, is irresistibly led to wish for the conversion of others, and to attempt it, by such means as lie within the scope of his particular duties; and if by no other means, yet at least by a studious adorning of the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things. Zeal for the honour of God as concerned in the salvation of sinners, is a powerful motive with every sincere Christian. It is a most convincing, and, to Him who reads the hearts of men, probably a most acceptable expression of gratitude for that mercy, the richness of which he who has experienced it himself, naturally desires may be tasted by others. The apostle Peter would, no doubt, have been animated by this holy zeal, even if the duty had not been urged upon him with so solemn an emphasis by his Divine Master; "*When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*"¹ The duty inculcated in that precept, is a duty of universal and perpetual obligation; not limited to the individual apostle and his brethren, nor to the case of a single

¹ St. Luke xxii. 32.

recovery from sin; but applicable to all, who by the grace of God have been brought to a clear apprehension of their relation to Him, that they should desire and endeavour to place others in the same improved condition with themselves. We are justified, then, in saying, that this desire, evidencing itself in the endeavour, is a sign of seriousness of heart in religion; and that he who does not experience it, has but an imperfect and inadequate apprehension of his privileges and duties as a Christian. He does not fully understand that the glory of God is an object to be constantly aimed at by His servants; and that we are to aim at it, not merely by giving Him the glory of our own conversion and adoption into His family, but by bringing others to glorify Him also. “*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*” Our Saviour does not say explicitly, Let the light of true religion burn within your breast, to animate your zeal and diligence in working out your own salvation; that is taken for granted; but, Let it so shine before men, that they may see its palpable results in your godly and Christian lives, and give glory to God for having imparted to mankind a true and efficacious religion; that so they may be led to consider its claims, and submit to its authority themselves: thus will God be glorified, not only

in your salvation through Jesus Christ, but in the conversion of others by the agency of your example. The same principle is insisted upon by the apostles, who desired that others should be followers of them, even as they were followers of Christ; and that every one who followed them should be in turn a guide and pattern to others; every man walking and conversing under a sense of the obligation laid upon him, not only to hold fast the truth, and to embody it in his practice, with a view to his own eternal welfare, but to win over others to the cause of their salvation; and to have respect to edification in the whole of his outward actions and demeanour, “*that God in all things might be glorified, through Jesus Christ.*”¹ Such is the meaning of St. Peter, when he urges upon the Christians of Asia, as a motive to diligence and circumspectness in their conversation, that they were living amongst unbelievers, who, says the apostle, “*by your good works which they shall behold, may glorify God in the day of visitation,*”² may be gained over to the knowledge and acceptance of that truth whereby men may glorify God. Again, when St. Paul declares to the Christians at Corinth, the care which he himself had used, to “*provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men;*”³ and exhorts those at Rome to “*provide things honest*

¹ 1 St. Peter iv. 11.² Ibid. ii. 12.³ 2 Cor. viii. 21.

*"in the sight of all men ;"*¹ why is it, but that he was deeply sensible how powerful an influence is exerted by the personal example of professors, in swaying the minds of others to embrace or reject the principles which they profess ; and in how great a degree the diffusion and growth of Christianity would depend upon the consistent and exemplary walk of its adherents. And if this was the case in the age of the apostles, when the mighty energies of the Spirit were visibly put forth to sow the good seed, to watch over the process of its development, to root it firmly in the soil, and to rear it to the majestic dimensions of a tree, under the shadow of whose branches all nations might take shelter ; of not less importance, surely, is Christian example as an instrument of conversion or edification in these later days of the Church, when the cause of the Gospel is left to the ordinary means and resources of human agency, aided and blessed by the Holy Spirit in proportion to the zeal and fidelity with which those means are used.

When the claims of the Gospel are seriously and candidly examined, the historical testimony to its truth is sufficient to commend it to the understanding, and its internal evidence is still more convincing and satisfactory to the heart. But there are many, alas, too many, who are with difficulty moved to enter upon an honest

¹ Romans xii, 17.

and patient examination of either branch of evidence ; and to such as these it is most important that there should be presented a species of testimony, against which they cannot close their eyes ; which presses itself on their notice in their daily intercourse with the world ; in the relations of domestic life ; in the complication of their nearest and dearest interests ; the testimony of a Christian life, the testimony of godliness, honesty, purity, self-denial, charity. How beautiful and affecting is the counsel given by St. Peter : “ *Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands ; that if any obey not the Word, they also may, without the Word, be won by the conversation of the wives, while they behold your chaste conversation, coupled with fear ;* ”¹ and still more affecting the question of St. Paul, “ *For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband ?* ”² Those who will not contemplate the full effulgence of Divine light in the character and precepts of the Redeemer Himself, or the glorious reflection of it which beamed in the lives and teaching of His holy apostles, may yet be constrained to catch some glimpses of its radiance in the conversation of His faithful, though imperfect followers in every age of His Church : for to them, as well as to His immediate disciples, belongs, though in a less pregnant sense, the

¹ 1 St. Peter iii. 1, 2.

² 1 Cor. vii. 16.

description—a glorious yet awful description—
*“Ye are the light of the world.”*¹ *“Do all
 things,”* says St. Paul, *“without murmurings
 and disputings; that ye may be blameless and
 harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in
 the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,
 among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”*²

In how many instances is the force of Christian example the first engine by which the Holy Spirit opens a door for the admission of grace and truth into the hard or careless heart. How many a sinner has been awakened and softened by the exercise of those graces, of which he had no conception till he saw them exemplified in their effects.

One of the first apologists of Christianity, commenting on our Lord's words, *“Let your light so shine before men,”* said of the Christians of his time, “We are not permitted to oppose violence to violence; nor did Christ will that we should be imitators of the evil; but He enjoined us by patience and meekness to draw away all men from shameful lusts; which we can prove to be the case with many who belong to us; who from having been violent and overbearing have become changed and softened, either by attending to the constancy of their neighbours' life, or by perceiving the strange patience of their fellow-

¹ 1 St. Matt. v. 14.

² Philippians ii. 14, 15.

“wayfarers when defrauded, or by their experience of those with whom they have been engaged in business.”¹ It was this argument which had gained over the apologist himself from the refinements of a false but specious philosophy to the practical simplicity of Gospel truth; judging of the tree from its fruits, he was induced to taste them; and he found in them the savour of eternal life.

But the value and efficacy of an exemplary conversation are perhaps rendered most apparent, by being placed in contrast with the evils which result from an opposite conduct. Example is a powerful agent for evil as well as for good; and, unhappily, more powerful for evil than for good; for in the one case it has all the passions of the natural man for its allies, in the other, for its opponents. Examples of eminent piety and goodness are reluctantly noticed and negligently imitated; but examples which seem to recommend or justify things forbidden in the Word of God, are eagerly sought and readily copied. A good example will probably influence a few to consider their ways and turn their thoughts to religion; but an evil example will be sure to confirm many in their sinful thoughts and practices; and is likely to shake, perhaps to shipwreck, the fluctuating principles of some, whose faith is

¹ Justin Martyr, *Apolog.* I. Sect. 16.

imperfect and half formed. It is this sin against the honour of God and the dearest interests of our brethren, that was so emphatically condemned by our blessed Lord under the name of offences, or scandals. “*Woe unto*”
 “*the world because of offences! for it must needs*”
 “*be that offences come; but woe to that man*”
 “*by whom the offence cometh!*”¹ Woe to him, who either by direct opposition and discouragement, or by the pernicious influence of an ungodly example, casts a stumbling-block in the way of his brethren, who are walking with doubtful, trembling steps, along the narrow path that leads to eternal life! Woe unto him! for their ruin and apostasy shall be laid at the door of him who has caused it. “*Whoso shall offend*”
 “*one of these little ones which believe in Me,*”
 “*it were better for him that a millstone were*”
 “*hanged about his neck, and that he were*”
 “*drowned in the depth of the sea.*”²

It was a holy fear of falling under this denunciation, combined with an ardent love for the souls of men, which moved the great apostle to declare, “*When ye sin against the brethren,*”
 “*and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against*”
 “*Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother*”
 “*to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world*”
 “*standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.*”³
 O that it might please God, by His Holy Spirit,

¹ St. Matt. xviii. 7.² Ibid. ver. 6.³ 1 Cor. viii. 12, 13.

to shed abroad in the hearts of all those who profess to believe in His Son, and to desire the success of His Gospel, a larger measure of that charity, which not only cares for the present welfare and comfort of other men, but shrinks from the thought of injuring their eternal interests; which suggests not merely the trivial sacrifice of things indifferent in themselves, for the sake of their salvation, but acts of self-denial, which may be spoken of as the cutting off of a hand, or the plucking out of an eye, rather than be accessory to the destruction of an immortal soul!

I need not dwell upon the impediments which have been thrown in the way of the Gospel, and of the advantages which have been given to its enemies, by the evil example of its professors. Some of the earliest Fathers of the Church admonished their brethren, that if any believer were known to have committed an unlawful action, he not only injured himself, but scandalized and disgraced the Church.¹ The injustice, the censoriousness, the persecuting spirit of Christians, was sure to be imputed to Christianity; and, therefore, to his precepts of charity, and honesty, and meekness, St. Paul was wont to subjoin, as a reason and motive, “*that the Name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed.*”²

¹ Apost. Constitutions, ii. 8.

² 1 Timothy vi. 1.

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But the general importance of a consistent and exemplary life on the part of Christians for the sake of Christianity itself, is too manifest to require that we should prove it. We are all ready to admit, not only that a visible and notorious disagreement between our profession and our practice, will ensure to us a portion among the hypocrites, but that if it be extensively prevalent, it cannot but seriously impede the growth of true religion, and encourage and uphold that power which the Son of God came upon earth to abolish and destroy. The difficulty is, to persuade men to apply this general principle to their own particular case, and to inquire in what manner, and to what degree, they are themselves individually bound to be exemplary in their conversation, not only as being engaged in the work of their own salvation, but for the sake of Christ, and of those who are, or ought to be Christ's, and whose continuing, or becoming so, may in some measure depend upon their example; following, as St. Paul exhorts, "*after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another; that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion to fall, in his brother's way.*"¹ Yet this is indeed a question of very close and solemn concern to every one of us; chiefly, and in a most awful sense, to the ministers of Christ,

¹ Romans xiv. 19, 13.

who are to be lights in the world, and leaders, and guides, and patterns for the flock to follow; but also in due proportion and degree to every member of His household. “Am I setting a good example? Does my light so shine before men, as to illustrate the excellence of God’s perfect law, and to cast something of an attractive brightness on the path of the just? Am I doing anything, by direct persuasion, or by the attractiveness of example, to win souls to Christ?” If we cannot venture to hope that we are thus effectually advancing the cause of our Master, and so adorning His doctrine as to commend it to the consciences of the unbelieving world, have we no reason to apprehend, on the other hand, that any part of our lives and conversation is such as to give countenance and encouragement to the despisers of Jesus Christ, or discouragement and offence to any of His weak disciples? “Am I indeed pure from the blood of all men? Lives there the person who can say of me: I did indeed doubt whether such or such an action was altogether consistent with my profession; but there is one who, with better opportunities of knowing the truth than I have ever enjoyed, did not scruple to do it, and therefore why should I?” Let me press these inquiries home to your consciences individually. It is only by applying them to yourselves that you will perceive how

closely the example, which you set to others, is connected with the question both of their salvation and your own.

Observe, I am not commending anything like affected singularity, or preciseness, or asceticism, which do, perhaps, as much injury to the cause of piety on the one hand, as examples of profaneness on the other ; and yet if those around us do evil, we must be content to be singular, “ *the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation ;*”¹ for the narrow way is of Christ’s own making, and we must walk therein, whether others follow us or no. But I am only pleading for that measure of conformity between our principles and practice, which common sense and common honesty require ; and which is the least that can be looked for by Him, who, as He has given us peculiar helps and advantages, may reasonably expect of us their peculiar results.

Let me illustrate my reasoning by stating a particular case. Unhappily it is one of every-day occurrence. A young person, who has been trained up by the care of pious parents or friendly teachers in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, enters into the service of some rich or noble family ; and his father, or his anxious mother, or his spiritual pastor, bids him an affectionate farewell, with an injunction to set

¹ Philippians ii. 15.

the Lord always before him. He has been taught that the daily study of God's Word is a most important duty and privilege, and he continues, for a time, the habit which he had acquired of searching the Scriptures; but he soon finds that none of his fellow-servants read their Bible; and he is told that this is a part of their conduct which is never inquired into; a duty which they are never exhorted nor encouraged to perform; and moreover it is doubted, whether their master ever performs it himself. By degrees, therefore, he lays it aside, and takes one fearful step backwards in the path of life. Again, he has heard much of family devotion, and of the duty incumbent upon every Christian master of assembling his household, day by day, round the domestic altar. But he finds no such practice in the family which he serves, who have certainly, as he concludes, had ample opportunities of knowing what is right. Again, he has always been accustomed to make a particular acknowledgment of God's bounty at his meals. The neglect of this duty was scandalous, even to a proverb, in the heathen world; but it is without shame laid aside at the tables of those Christians who have most to be thankful for; and the servant, seeing it omitted by his master, is not likely to practise it himself. He has been trained up all his life to reverence the Christian Sabbath, as a season of rest and improvement, mercifully

interposed between the hours of bodily toil and spiritual distractions, to be devoted to the honour of God, and the refreshment of his own soul. And he finds (I am here supposing a favourable case) that his employers do once every Sunday go to church ; but that there the religion of the week ends with them as to the outward honour paid to it ; and that during the remainder of the Lord's day they make no scruple of breaking its holy rest themselves, nor of infringing upon the Christian liberty of their servants in an endless variety of ways. And so it is rendered scarcely possible for that class of Christians who, above all others, perhaps, most need the restraints and encouragements of religion, to obey the commands of God, or to improve the only opportunity which they might have, of becoming better acquainted with the things which concern their peace. The servant who sees his employers live in the habitual neglect of what he has been taught to consider one of the most sacred and important of religious duties, will soon be brought to undervalue the duty, to doubt the sincerity of those, whose practice is so much at variance with their profession, and at length, if not to question the truth of religion itself, to break loose from all its restraints, and to live without God in the world. And who will be answerable in the sight of God for the ruin of that soul ? How can persons, who profess to believe the Gospel, and know the methods by which alone a sinner can

be saved, be blind to the inhumanity of breaking down the faith and principles of their servants by their own profane or careless example ; employing them upon the purposes of unseasonable luxury or amusement on the day which the Lord calls His own, and which, as it was made for man, was made especially for those who have no other day on which they can profit by the Church's ordinances, and find rest for their souls and bodies in the exercises of religion ? But the example set by those who are masters and heads of families, exerts a salutary or a baneful influence far beyond the limits of their own households ; and in proportion to the advantages they enjoy, as stewards of the gifts of God entrusted to them for the general good, is the responsibility which binds them to let their light so shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father which is in heaven. The duty of setting a good example rests upon all, whose example is looked to by any others ; and especially on the higher classes of society, who are, as it were, set on a hill, and cannot be hid : and it is a duty which seems to be pressed upon them most closely by the present state of the world. In proportion as the poorer classes are enlightened and informed by education, they will be more observant of the conduct of their superiors, better able to appreciate it, and more likely to be scandalized by its inconsistency with the principles which they have been taught to regard

as of sacred obligation and importance. They will learn to despise those, whose example they may not follow ; or if they follow the example, their own principles are weakened, and the benefit of their education lost. And so it is, that the more general the diffusion of knowledge, the more direct will be the tendency of an evil example in the higher ranks (I mean all ranks which are higher than the poor), to loosen the ties which bind the different orders of society together, and to endanger the safety of the whole. The present constitution of society implies a special obligation, incumbent upon those who enjoy the largest share of its advantages, to use them for the good of the whole ; and above all things, to promote the glory of God, by advancing the interests of the Gospel, the greatest benefit they can confer upon mankind. They are, at least they ought to be, in this respect, the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost its savour, what is it good for ? what are its uses ? what will be its end ? What have we to expect, if the supports of Christianity, instead of being strengthened by those who possess the means of doing so, are broken down, either by their direct hostility, or by the not less injurious influence of a careless and profane example ; by a shameful parsimony in the cause of Christ and of His Church, contrasted with the profuseness of self-indulgence and vainglory, and by a disregard and neglect of the ordinances of religion ?

There is one consideration, and one only, which can influence all orders of men to carry out the principle of exemplarity enforced by our Saviour in the words of my text, and that is, an habitual remembrance that the work which they have to do is the Lord's work ; and that it is to be so done as to contribute to His glory. This principle must direct and colour not only the more important and conspicuous actions of their lives, but the tenour of their every-day conduct and behaviour—" *Whether ye eat or drink,*" says St. Paul, "*or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God ;*"¹ and again, with a more especial reference to our character, as members of Christ's mystical body, "*Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus.*"² In proportion as that holy Name is seen to be written on our hearts and on the general features of our conduct, God will be glorified, and His Gospel commended to the consciences of men. Let us seek more earnestly for grace, that we may "*adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*"³ Let those who are stationed on the vantage ground of life, be exemplary in performing all the outward duties of religion, and manifest a Christian spirit of condescension and kindness towards their brethren, who toil and struggle in the vale below, bearing in mind, that "*we being many, are one body in Christ,*

¹ 1 Cor. x. 31.² Coloss. iii. 17.³ Titus ii. 10.

*“and every one members one of another.”*¹

And let the poor strive to learn, and to teach one another, the difficult lessons of contentedness, honesty, frugality; working the works of their calling and eating their own bread with quietness, yet in a Christian spirit of independence, accepting with thankfulness the kindness of others, but trusting mainly to their own honest exertions; which, if they are prompted by a desire to please God, and put forth in humble reliance upon His blessing, will not fail of their due reward.

Finally, brethren, if the growth of true religion be an object worthy of your care; if the moral and social improvement of the community in which you live be an end, which duty and interest alike bind you to pursue; if present happiness or a future recompense be worth your seeking; if you desire to honour the Saviour in whom you profess to trust, and to be workers together with Him in the great enterprise which He is still carrying on by the Holy Spirit, of destroying the power of Satan, and saving souls from the second death, then *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

¹ Romans xii. 5.

SERMON XVI.

LIFE IN CHRIST, AND DEATH IN CHRIST.

PHILIPPIANS I. 21.

To me, to live is Christ; and to die is gain.

WE have here, in the fewest possible words, the true character of a Christian's life, and the sure results of his death; and if the connexion between the two be indissoluble, which no believers in Holy Scripture can doubt, we have, in this short sentence, a final and peremptory decision of the most important of all questions, How are we to live, that we may be certain of happiness when we die? In fact, the whole subject and business of religion is summed up in the solution of this question; all its requirements and obligations; its consolations and its hopes; the concerns of time, and the interests of eternity.

Had this question been proposed, as indeed it often was proposed, in the school of heathen philosophy, no distinct and positive answer

could have been given. Supposing man to be immortal and accountable, it might be with probability concluded, that those who were pious and virtuous during life, would be gainers by death. But then the teachers in that school had neither any sure ground for believing in a future state of existence, nor any infallible rule for determining wherein piety and virtue consisted; although each man had within his own breast, a faculty or instinct, sufficient to inform him of the leading principles of the divine law, and to convince him in his own person of sin. With respect to the foundations of duty, and its bearings upon all the relations of life; still more with regard to the nature and attributes of God, and the worship due to Him from His reasonable creatures; and, above all, as to the grand questions of immortality and a future retribution, the wisest and most unprejudiced masters of ancient philosophy, in despair of attaining to the certainty of truth, contented themselves with seeking and establishing that which appeared most likely to be true. To them, therefore, an inquirer would in vain have proposed the questions, What is the object of life? and, What are to be the results of death? If the Deist of modern times is ready with a conclusive, though fallacious answer, "Live, so as to please God by your virtuous

and honourable conduct, and He will reward you with an immortality of glory and happiness;" the foundations of this belief—the true foundations of an erroneous belief—are to be found in the disclosures of that Gospel by which life and immortality have been brought to light; but he will not go thither for his definition of virtue and honour, nor for the conditions of that reward which he holds out.

Propose the same question to the mere man of the world, and he will either answer you, that he does not much concern himself about such matters; or he will give you a very vague and confused account of the duties which he imagines are to be performed in this life, in order to secure the blessedness of that which is to come. He will say something, perhaps, of being a Christian; of going to church; of living respectably, and honestly, and honourably, whatever meaning he may attach to these terms; and he will express a hope, the grounds of which he will be at a loss to assign, that God will deal mercifully with him, and not be extreme to mark what is done amiss, nor inquire too particularly into the motives which have actuated his conduct, or the objects which he has chiefly pursued during life. But if we turn to an apostle of Jesus Christ, and ask of *him*, What is life? and, What will be after death? he answers, in words which are utterly

incomprehensible to the children of this world, "*To me, to live is Christ; and to die is gain.*"

Now, as it is undoubtedly true of every faithful follower of Jesus Christ, that to him, under all imaginable circumstances, "*to die is gain,*" so it may well be questioned whether any man can be justly designated as such, of whom it cannot be said with truth, that to him, "*to live is Christ.*" It is, therefore, plainly, of great importance to every one of us, to ascertain in what sense he must be able to apply to himself the first part of the apostle's declaration, in order that he may be sure of realizing the second.

The expression, "*to live is Christ,*" plainly implies, with respect to the apostle himself, nothing less than this—that Christ was the chief subject of his thoughts; the chief if not the sole object of his affections: that to love Him, and honour Him, and serve Him, and promote His cause, was the grand design, and aim, and business of his life; that to this he devoted, entire and undivided, his heart, his faculties, his strength—all his energies both of body and soul; that he set no value upon any of these, except so far as they could be made subservient to the cause of Christ and His Gospel; that his meat and drink was to do His will, and to make Him known to sinners; and that whatsoever he did, all

was done in the name and for the sake of Christ. Christ was the theme of his preaching, the substance of his knowledge, the object of his love, the ornament of his apostleship ; in whom, and by whom, and for whom he lived, and moved, and had his being. The declaration in the text follows immediately upon an expression of the earnest desire and confident hope entertained by St. Paul, "*that as always, so now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death.*"¹ In the case then of that great apostle it appears that the definition "*to live is Christ,*" implied nothing less than an absolute renunciation of self, as the principal object of affection, and as a ruling motive of conduct ; and an entire, unreserved devotion of the whole man, both soul and body, to Christ ; that is, to do the work, to serve the cause, to spread the knowledge, to recommend the Gospel of Christ.

If it be asked whether it be absolutely necessary that every one who desires to love the Lord Jesus in sincerity should be able to declare with truth, that his life is thus unreservedly given up to Him whose name he bears ; and all its interests and objects identified with His : we reply, that if the expression which we are considering be viewed as embodying the grand principle of Christian love and allegiance, there

¹ Philippians i. 20.

is no doubt but that every servant of Christ is required to exhibit its efficacy in his own conduct and character : but that in the application of this principle, there must of necessity be a difference of details, according to the varying circumstances of the Church of Christ, and of its individual members. Undoubtedly the self-renunciation and devotion to the work of Christ, which were so conspicuous in St. Paul, as being specially set apart for the exclusive performance of that work, were very different, both in kind and degree, from those which are to be exhibited by the great mass of believers in Christ in ordinary times, compelled as they are to take part in the daily business of the world, and not ordained and appointed to the special work of setting forward the cause of the Gospel. And yet it can never cease to be the duty, or the characteristic of a true Christian, to give himself up to Christ, not only sacramentally in baptism, wherein he first takes upon himself the Cross of Christ, and all its obligations, but in the whole tenour of his life, his thoughts, affections, and habits ; nor can it ever cease to be binding upon him to make the honour of his Saviour, and the success of His Gospel in the Church, the constant objects of his wishes and endeavours. It was not a precept of temporary obligation, or of limited purport, in which St. Paul embodied this principle : “ *Whatsoever ye do, in word or in*

“*deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ;*”¹ that is, in the strength derived from Him, and with a view to the advancement of His glory :—again, “*Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.*”² We maintain, therefore, that it is still characteristic of the true Christian to be able to say of himself, with reference to his motives, and aims, and rules of proceeding, “*To me, to live is Christ.*” The Gospel of Jesus Christ is to be his single and paramount rule of action, as far as the great principles of conduct are concerned. To glorify God in Christ, through the Church, by working out his own salvation, and by forwarding the salvation of others, is to be his chief aim ; that, with which no others are to interfere ; and the love of Christ, that love which Christ has manifested for him, and the reciprocal, though infinitely inferior, sentiment of grateful affection which he bears towards his Saviour, this should be his constraining motive.

That in the all-important question of our salvation we must look entirely to Christ, as its author and finisher, is a truth which needs no demonstration to a Christian. By the atonement which He has made for our sins, and by no other method or device, we are reconciled unto God, and made capable of doing things acceptable to Him. By His Spirit, the Comforter

¹ Colos. iii. 17.

² 1 Cor. x. 31.

whom He hath sent to be to us in His stead, we are first regenerated, then renewed, sanctified, enlightened, supported in the course of duty. Through His intercession our prayers are graciously accepted, and answered with blessings. By the continued administration of that sovereignty, which, in His mediatorial character, He exercises over those whom He has redeemed, we are protected and preserved. In our struggles against the evil tendencies of a corrupt nature and the influences of a deceitful world, no efforts will be crowned with success but those which are put forth in the sufficiency of His imparted strength; nor will that strength be imparted, in answer to our prayers, if those prayers be not offered in virtue of our covenant relation to Him. As far then as our spiritual life is concerned, it is manifest in what sense we must be able to say, that with us, "*to live is Christ.*" We must live in Him and by Him, in virtue of the perpetual union which subsists between Christ and the members of His mystical body. By the secret influences of His Spirit He imparts to us His own image and similitude; we must personify His life in ours, and be, as Christians, living representatives of Christ.

But there are other duties and elements of character included in that expression, which arise from our relation to Christ as His peculiar people. He came into the world to reconcile

mankind to God, and to sanctify them through obedience, to final salvation. Having effected the first of these objects by His precious death upon the cross, and having secured to His servants the promised presence and indwelling of the Comforter, by which the second might be realized to each individual believer; He left to His Church, pre-eminently to the Ministry, but in due proportion, also, to every servant of His household, the duty of carrying forward the great work for which He came into the world, by bringing men to the knowledge of His Gospel, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, and by adding to the Church those who are to be saved. And it is a source of pure and sacred joy, as it is a point of clear and unequivocal duty, with every faithful servant of Jesus Christ, together with the prayers and desires and struggles by which he labours to work out his own salvation, to combine the most earnest wishes, the most fervent intercessions, the most zealous endeavours, to promote the salvation of others; carrying out by all practicable methods, and at all possible opportunities, the spirit of his Master's solemn injunction to St. Peter, "*When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren;*"¹ and of St. Peter's own precept to the Church at large, which, if it had reference to temporal

¹ St. Luke xxii. 32.

things, is assuredly not less applicable to spiritual, "*As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*"¹ He is, therefore, active and liberal in devising and promoting every reasonable and promising method of glorifying God by the conversion of sinners. He esteems it a privilege and honour to be engaged as a humble fellow-worker with apostles and evangelists, nay, with the Saviour Himself, in that glorious undertaking, for which holy men have witnessed a good confession, and saints have laboured and martyrs have suffered, and the Incarnate Son of God agonized and died. But he remembers, that if in more peaceable times of His Church, God does not require His servants to testify their adherence to the Gospel of His blessed Son by their deaths, it is all the more requisite that they should glorify Him by their lives; "*adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things;*"² and by a personal "*manifestation of the truth, commending themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.*"³

And is there aught of unreasonableness in this? Is not the cause of Christ's Church of necessity advanced or impeded by the conduct and demeanour of its members? As to its ministers no question is made. If they fail

¹ 1 St. Peter iv. 10.² Titus ii. 10.³ 2 Cor. iv. 2.

to make it manifest, that to them, to live is Christ, they are condemned as falling short of the plain requirements of their calling. But why are they expected to live up to the standard of what they teach, but that they may excite and encourage others to aim at the same degrees of excellence? The exhibition of Christian principle in all those fruits of the Spirit which prove its strength and loveliness, is a duty binding upon *all* the members of Christ's Church. A mere passive acquiescence in the truth of Christianity will not suffice, nor a mere compliance with the Church's rules. Does any person suppose, that to glorify God by living unto Christ, means only, that we are to honour Him and to promote the interests of His Gospel by the regular observance of stated forms, and an abstinence from gross and palpable offences against the moral law? Let us clothe the question in other words, and ask, whether a Christian be bound to show himself a Christian at church only, and on the Lord's day; or whether it be not a part of the duty of every day and every hour, to exhibit, in the countless variety of ways which the course of social life affords, the blessed influence of a true faith, and so to walk worthy of his vocation? We ask again, is there aught of unreasonableness in his being required so to do? Would there be anything unreasonable in it, even if it went

to the extent of demanding from us an entire renunciation of all pursuits and interests, not having a direct bearing upon the glory of God in our own salvation? Surely not; unless we are prepared to say, that it is not worth while to postpone the concerns of time to the interests of eternity, or to abjure the world rather than lose our own souls. Assuredly, then, there is nothing unreasonable, nor severe, in requiring, that without the necessary sacrifice of any real good, of anything which is a legitimate object of desire to a being destined for eternity, we should have a constant and pervading regard to the glory of God, who made us, to the honour of that Saviour who gave Himself for us to purchase us as a peculiar people for Himself, and to the salvation of those for whom, in common with ourselves, He devised and accomplished that wonderful plan of mercy; in a word, that while we live, we should live unto Christ.

But it will be said, that in the present state of the world this is not possible; that in fulfilling the ordinary duties of life, our actions must of necessity have so little connexion with the great principles and rules of the Gospel, that we can hardly shape them so as to have any direct bearing upon the glory of God, or the advancement of His great designs of mercy. Now, if this were really so, it would furnish a just ground of suspicion, that there must be

something radically wrong in the economy of human society in countries professing Christianity. That must be an essentially unlawful condition of social existence, which precludes a reasonable creature from glorifying his Creator by the general aspect and tenour of his daily life; still more, if it nullifies or keeps in abeyance all those additional motives to a characteristic and peculiar conduct, which are supplied by the truths, and precepts, and promises of the Gospel. If the world in which we live and move be such as this, it is a world out of which we are commanded to come, and not to love it, neither the things that are in it. And it must be admitted, that the present aspect of the visible Church of Christ gives too much colour to the supposition, that the duties we owe to society must of necessity interfere with the exemplary performance of those which are implied in the name of Christian. Multitudes bear that name, to whom it is applicable only in a very limited sense. Born and educated in a country professing Christianity, they acquiesce in its truth without inquiry, and without applying its revelations to themselves. But to a real, though spiritual union with Christ, faith in His atoning blood, love of His divine Person, a joyful hope of His second coming, they are entire strangers. They associate the sacred name of Christ with the

spirit of this world, its follies and vices. To them, indeed, to live is anything but Christ; their service to Him is merely nominal; and they establish, as far as they can, the dangerous delusion, that such a service is all that Christ requires of His followers who are engaged in the necessary business of life. But it is not true that our functions and duties, as members of human society, are incompatible with the pervading and paramount obligation which binds us to do all things to the glory of God. It is not true, that in order to be good and useful citizens, we must cease to be exemplary Christians. On the contrary, it is the stedfast, consistent, courageous servant of Christ, who upon the whole passes through life with the greatest credit and comfort; and who in the end reaps a rich harvest of golden opinions, as having lived not less to the advantage of his country and of mankind, than to the honour and advancement of the religion which he professed. Will any one dispute the position, that the distinguishing precepts of Christianity may be asserted and exemplified, not only in the pulpit, or in the circle of domestic teaching and example; but in the places of public concourse, the school, the senate-house, the courts of princes, and the halls of justice? If religion can be dishonoured, as, alas! we know it can, it can also be honoured; and it has

been and will be, by the few who have piety and courage enough to stand by their Saviour; and, oh, that there were ten thousand times as many bent upon doing public honour to that Saviour, and openly testifying their allegiance to Him!

But without referring to those special occasions, which manifestly involve the question of confessing or denying Christ before men, I would desire every one who hears me, to inquire of his own conscience, whether his daily life and conversation are of a complection so decidedly Christian, as to mark him to the world for a follower of Christ, and a member of that spiritual body of which He is the Head: whether it be clearly and prominently an object of desire with him, to do all in his power to promote the cause of His Gospel, or at least to do nothing which may discredit it, and scandalize inquirers after truth; or whether Jesus Christ, the author and finisher of his faith, the Captain of his salvation, his Redeemer, his Intercessor, his King, his Judge, might not be much more present to his mind, and possess a much larger share of his affections, and be more honoured by his deeds, than is now the case; without interfering in the least with the right discharge of all the active duties of life, or even with the enjoyment of any of its legitimate pleasures?

With this question, which may not be safely evaded nor put aside, I quit the subject ; desiring you once more to consider, in what sense every Christian may justly be required to say with St. Paul, "*To me, to live is Christ.*" It is this, and surely nothing less than this, to believe and trust in Him as an Almighty Saviour ; to follow Him implicitly as a sure Guide ; to obey Him as a Supreme Lawgiver ; to love Him as the chief of benefactors ; to aim at advancing His honour and extending His Church ; to go forth to the conflict of sin and Satan in His strength ; to look for acceptance only through His merits and intercession ; to pray for future blessings in His name, and to acknowledge past mercies as vouchsafed to us for His sake ; to render more intimate our union with Him by every method of His own appointment, in His Word, His Sacraments, and the ordinances of His Church ; to read of Him, to meditate upon Him ; to place Him before us in all our undertakings, relations and employments ; in short, to have "*Christ formed within us,*" and as far as human weakness, strengthened by grace, will permit, to embody and personify Him outwardly in our lives.

To him who can declare of himself in this sense, that *to live is Christ*, no person who believes the Gospel can entertain any doubt, that *to die is gain*. Perplexed and straitened

by trials of extreme and varied sharpness, it is no wonder if the great apostle declared, that he had "*a desire to depart and be with Christ ; which,*" says he, "*is far better.*" But what circumstances of life can be imagined, in which it would not be far better, for a man like St. Paul, to depart and be with Christ? True it is, that even with the sincere and confirmed Christian, under certain circumstances, there may be natural feelings and attachments, or occasional misgivings and apprehensions, mingling themselves with the brightness of his prospects and alloying the sweetness of his hopes, and preventing his soul from attaining to more than a tranquil and settled resignation. Yet, though he feels himself perhaps unable to desire the change, he never doubts but that it will be gain to him; and the assurance of its being so is the only solid and effectual consolation which remains to his surviving friends. If he, whom they lament, had lived entirely for himself, or for them, to his own interests or pleasures, or to their's, his departure would have been an object of just apprehension to him, a subject of painful and unavailing sorrow to them. He who has not walked with Christ during life, will assuredly not be with Him after death. But the Christian who lives in the habitual contemplation of his Saviour, and in daily communion with Him, sometimes in

prayer, sometimes in the spiritual participation of His body and blood, setting the Lord alway before him, identifying his interests, and, as far as possible, his personal character with those of his Master, will find the bands of that mystical union strengthened and drawn more close, in proportion as all earthly ties are weakened and dissolved; will have a distinct and vivid perception of Christ, while every object of worldly interest and desire is fading from his view; and will experience the light of His countenance to be more intense and vivifying, in proportion as the shadow of "the dark mountains" intercepts the waning brightness of departing day. And at the last, when the portals of the eternal world are opening to receive his spirit, which still, perhaps, trembles under the last pressure of natural infirmity, a voice is heard by the dying saint, and echoed in accents of comfort and assurance to those who stand around his bed of death, "*To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.*"

SERMON XVII.

THE REVELATION OF THE FUTURE.

2 CORINTHIANS IV. 18.

*The things which are seen are temporal ; but the things
which are not seen are eternal.*

AMONGST the many marks of a divine origin which lie upon the surface of the Christian Scriptures, and which to a rightly constituted mind are most convincing evidences of their authenticity, is the language in which they speak of a future state. The certainty of such a state is the peculiar disclosure of revelation ; a certainty which the natural reason of man ardently longs to obtain, and is led by conscience to hope for, but which can only be established as a truth, and made an object of faith, by a direct assurance proceeding from the Divine Author of our being, who made us what we are, and can alone determine what we are to be : “ *Jesus Christ* “ *hath brought life and immortality to light through*

“*the Gospel.*”¹ To the inventor of a religious system to be imposed upon mankind, it would appear a natural course, in order to conciliate belief to the doctrine of a future state, to describe it, not only in a few of its broad outlines, with some bold touches of his fancy, but to delineate it with as much particularity as possible; to enumerate and depict the variety of rewards and punishments which await the virtues or the crimes of men in the life to come; to lead the imagination to expatiate in the clear skies, and sunny meads, and by the bright rivers of Paradise, in an endless succession of delights; and to disclose the secret horrors of the eternal prison-house, where the sentence of divine justice is executed upon the condemned. I need hardly remind you, in illustration of this, of the fictions of heathen poetry, which were intended perhaps rather to amuse than to deceive; more striking instances of it are to be found in the systems of eastern mythology, and in the religion of the false prophet of Arabia. The difference between an authentic and a pretended revelation from God is perhaps in no particular more strikingly marked than by contrasting the rewards promised to piety and goodness in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament with those which are held out to the votaries of Mahomet; the Heaven of the Bible

¹ 2 Timothy i. 10.

with the Paradise of the Koran. While the false prophet, by a glowing and minute description of the pleasures which await the faithful in the life to come, endeavours to enlist the passions on the side of his religion, the Christian apostle, who had been caught up into the third heaven, and had seen the glories of paradise, and heard unspeakable words, tells us that they were such as it was "*not lawful,*" or possible,¹ "*for a man to utter.*"²

This reserve on the particular nature of the rewards which will be assigned to the spirits of the just made perfect, in a future state, combined with the assurance of their reality, is strongly characteristic of a divine revelation. It is an essential element in a rational belief of such a state, that the whole moral agent, both soul and body, will be translated into a more perfect condition of being, purified from all grossness, and emancipated from all the fetters which here on earth, even in our best estate, sense imposes upon mind. But if this be so, it is plain that we are, or may be, absolutely incapable of comprehending the precise nature, and certainly the extent, of that happiness which God has in store for them that love Him; and an attempt to delineate accurately that which, by its very nature, can be represented to us only by a very faint and general adumbration,

¹ ἐξόν.

² 2 Cor. xii. 4.

bespeaks not the hand of the Divine Artificer, who knows what He has made, and adapts His revelations to the capacities of those to whom they are addressed, but of an unskilful and presumptuous imitator. Of the blessedness of the world to come, or rather of our meetness for its enjoyment, St. John tells us, "*it doth not yet appear what we shall be:*"¹ nor does he afford us even a glimpse of it when he directs us to God Himself, whom no man hath seen nor can see, and says, "*we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*" There will be a state of perfection in the life to come, so far transcending any which can be attained by us in the flesh, that we are not able, from our present position, to discern its just proportions, nor to comprehend it in all its integrity. We cannot realize to ourselves the vastness and fulness of that happiness, to which the purified soul may be raised, nor apprehend how far the omnipotence of God, communicating its energies to a higher scale of being, may infuse into it a more refined and exalted kind of blessedness than any of which it is now capable. We know not yet the latent heat and fire of the soul, nor how its energies may expand and its capacities be dilated to receive the abundance of God's goodness; the influences of the Divine mind; nor what those emanations of Deity may be to

¹ 1 St. John iii. 2.

souls in glory. How is it possible that beings of a mixed and corrupt nature, breathing a moral atmosphere which is intimately tainted with the principle of evil, should taste by anticipation, except in very low and imperfect degrees, that pure and perfect bliss which will flow in ceaseless and unstinted abundance from the source of all good, and find an appropriate receptacle in the glorified spirit of the just man made perfect ?

It may be objected to this view of the subject, that if the nature of future rewards, and it may be added, of future punishment, is such as utterly to surpass and elude the grasp of our understanding, and to be inaccessible to the boldest flights of fancy, they are on that account wholly inappreciable by us, and are not fit to be proposed to us as motives to virtuous exertion, or as dissuasives from sinful indulgence. But there is no real force in this objection. With respect to the future happiness of the saints, it is in fact tasted by them by anticipation even in this life, in kind, although in an immeasurably inferior degree. The love of God shed abroad in their hearts by the Spirit ; that spiritual communion with Him, yielding a peace which passeth understanding ; the testimony of the Spirit bearing witness with their spirit that they are the sons of God ; and the delight which they experience in serving Him ; these are, as it were, the

elementary foretastes of the happiness which awaits them in heaven; the first steps in the scale of those beatitudes which begin in the distant contemplation and terminate in the near fruition of the glorious Godhead, in whose presence is the fulness of joy. The pleasures which are not seen, but are eternal, are most readily comprehended, or discerned, however dimly and imperfectly, by those who are most sincerely bent upon attaining them. One source of exquisite pleasure to the glorified saints, will undoubtedly be, a consciousness of their entire freedom and final escape from the pollution of sin, and the harmonious cooperation of all their faculties and powers of body and soul, in that work for which they were at first created, the glorifying of God. Nearly akin to this pure and holy pleasure, and of the same kind, though very inferior in degree, is the joy which is felt by the renewed Christian, when he finds himself enabled to resist temptation, to cast out every evil thought, and to enthrone God in his soul, and rejoice in the consciousness that he has escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. St. Peter declares of those who have so escaped, that they are made in some sense "*partakers of the divine nature.*"¹ They are therefore qualified to form some conception of that happiness which God has promised to all

¹ 2 St. Peter i. 4.

them that love Him, and to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. And so, as the life of God is formed in the soul, it becomes not only more meet for the happiness of heaven, but better acquainted with the nature of that happiness which waits upon the perfection of sanctity. Again, we can hardly conceive in what the happiness of God Himself consists, unless it be in the continued and unrestricted exercise of His attribute of love which St. John speaks of, as comprising and absorbing all the rest, "*God is love.*" This too will surely form a principal ingredient in the blessedness of the saints in light, who, when hope and faith are lost in fruition, and the love of God to man is seen in its just dimensions, will love Him with an intensity of affection, of which the deepest and strongest feelings of the human heart are but faint and feeble shadows. Nor is it unreasonable or presumptuous to believe, that the more immediate object of that fervent and transporting love, will be the glorified Saviour, in whose blood they have made white their robes, and who, we are told, "*shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.*"¹

Now in this respect more than any other the children of God enjoy a foretaste of heavenly bliss. It will be readily admitted that the exercise of genuine Christian love, in acts of

¹ Rev. vii. 17.

disinterested benevolence, is a source of the purest and most unalloyed pleasure. As it is the nearest approach which man can make to the attributes of Deity, so it may well be thought to yield the truest prelibation of celestial happiness. "*God is love,*" says St. John, "*and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*"¹ An exemption from all fear of evil is one of the most important elements of happiness; and as the consciousness of an entire immunity from sin and danger of every kind will contribute largely to the bliss of heaven, so the love of God shed abroad in the heart, purifying and ennobling all its affections, imparts to the believer a sense of security from harm, which enables him to maintain an even and tranquil walk amidst dangers and calamities, destructive of the peace of those who are less firmly established in the love of God. "*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*"²

Again, it is reasonable to believe that no inconsiderable part of the enjoyments of a future life will consist in the exercise of the social affections, purified from all taint of human corruption and infirmity. Our blessed Saviour indeed has given an intimation, that all earthly relationships will then so far have ceased, as

¹ 1 St. John iv. 16.

² Ibid. iv. 18.

no longer to bind individuals together by special ties, nor to require from them the performance of certain relative duties. But there is no reason to suppose, that there will be a final extinction of the affections, in which lie the blessedness and true sacredness of those relations. On the contrary, as all the best feelings of our nature impel us to hope, that in a future life we shall not only rejoin, but recognise those who have gone before us through the grave and gate of death; so there are intimations in Holy Scripture which encourage and strengthen that hope, although there are none perhaps which directly affirm its certainty. When the apostles were cast down with sorrow at the approaching departure of their Master, He consoled them with an assurance that they should see Him again. “*I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there ye may be also.*”¹ St. Paul exhorts his Thessalonian converts, not to sorrow for their departed friends, “*as others which have no hope;*” no hope, that is, of seeing them again; “*for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.*”² But a simple recognition in the life to come of those whom we have loved and honoured in this, will be in itself no source of happiness, if it be not accompanied with a revival of

¹ St. John xiv. 2, 3.

² 1 Thess. iv. 13, 14.

those tender, but pure and virtuous affections which are the essence of love and friendship; and which, as they give to the pang of separation all its bitterness, will surely constitute the blessedness of reunion in a more perfect state of existence.

Here, then, is an abundant source of the pleasures, which await the servants of God in the eternal world; of which a foretaste may undoubtedly be enjoyed by them even in the present life. It is by no means difficult for a well regulated mind to conceive the happiness which will flow in upon the sanctified heart, from the continued play and exercise of its deepest and warmest feelings; in the bright and clear atmosphere of perfect holiness, unsullied by the slightest admixture of grossness, or impurity, or selfishness; interrupted by no discord; unalloyed by the fear of diminution, or the prospect of separation.

The joys of heaven, then, are not so entirely shrouded from us, as to furnish no sensible motive to well-doing. Though remote and dimly seen, enough of them may be apprehended to influence our affections and hopes. The promises of future bliss touch a hidden cord of sympathy in the renewed and sanctified heart. The experience of actual joy realizes the prospects of its future perfectness. It is indeed true, that the apostle says in the words

of the evangelical prophet, "*Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.*" But he applies these words, not specially to the rewards of a future state, but to the whole mystery of godliness, the entire economy of the covenant of grace; "*even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world to our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But God,*" he says, "*hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*" If the words of the prophet are to be specially referred to the final recompense of the just, they must be understood to mean only, that we can form no adequate conception of the fulness, and perfectness, and transcending sweetness of those streams of heavenly pleasure, which make glad the city of God, and refresh its glorified inhabitants.

But there is one point in the Scripture revelation of the things of the unseen world, which gives it supreme importance—an importance which we are quite capable of appreciating, although we are utterly unable to comprehend, as a reality, the truth of that which is revealed. "*The things which are seen are temporal, but the*

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 7, 8, 9, 10.

“things which are not seen are eternal.” That one word eternal contains the perfection of the blessedness of heaven and of the torments of hell. As it is the eternity of future punishments which gives to them a weight and sharpness, calculated to pierce the hearts of obdurate sinners ; so is it necessary to the perfectness of that motive, which springs from the prospect of future happiness in heaven, that we should believe it to be eternal. To deny the perpetuity of future rewards and punishments, is to diminish, if not to destroy, the chief consolation of good men, and to hinder the repentance of the wicked. All our earthly enjoyments are alloyed and made imperfect by the fear of losing them ; and in proportion to the delight which they afford us, is the pain which that fear occasions. Mortality is the bane of all earthly pleasure. We pluck the bright and beautiful flower, but while we gaze on it with delight, it fades in our hands ; it *“fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.”* If then the joys of heaven were to last only for a certain period, and then for ever come to an end, the thought of that cessation would be a grievous drawback upon them during the whole of their duration ; and the more exquisite the happiness, the more painful the prospect of its final loss. Inferior degrees of bliss, if assured to us for ever, would be preferable to more transcendent joys, alloyed by the certainty of their

being taken away. But the language of Scripture on this subject is very plain and positive. If life and immortality, that is, immortal life, life without death, is the peculiar revelation of the Gospel, then must the eternity of future rewards be an essential doctrine of that Gospel; for eternal existence, unaccompanied by consciousness, is plainly equivalent to annihilation. If Christ, the glorified Messiah, is to reign for ever and ever, then must His faithful subjects, according to His own promise, live with Him for ever and ever. “*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.*”¹ The contrast, which the sacred writers delight to point out, between the joys and sorrows of this sublunary state, and those which will be consequent upon the final judgment, is far too strong and emphatic, to allow of our understanding it merely of the difference between that which is shortlived, and that which will be of longer duration, but must at length come to an end, because the very point and emphasis of the contrast consists in this, that while the one are terminable, the others have no end. “*An eternal weight of glory,*” “*a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens,*” “*an eternal inheritance,*” “*an incorruptible crown,*” “*a crown of glory that fadeth*

¹ Rev. iii. 21.

“*not away,*” “*an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled,*” all these are expressions not to be explained away to mean anything less than what they obviously signify. Were it so, there would be but little force or meaning in that sublime description of our final change, which has consoled and cheered the hearts of countless mourners at the most trying moment of their lives; “*The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*”¹ It is upon the never-ending duration of the joys of heaven that the apostles ground their arguments in favour of personal holiness, and self-denial, and heavenly-mindedness, and patience under suffering. It is the force of this doctrine which deprives adversity of its sting, and counteracts that venom of evil which invariably mingles itself with the cup of human felicity. Men are dissuaded from too eager a pursuit of “*the pleasures of sin for a season,*” by the assurance which is given them in the Word of God, “*at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*”² They are preserved from fainting under the pressure of evil, “*though the outward man perish,*” by the knowledge, that while “*the inward man is renewed day by day, our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh*

1 Cor. xv. 52, 53.

² Psalm xvi. 11.

*“for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight
“of glory; while we look, not at the things which
“are seen, but at the things which are not seen;
“for the things which are seen are temporal;
“but the things which are not seen are eternal.”*¹

And thus, under the extremity of affliction, persecuted by enemies, forsaken by friends, bereft of their dearest treasures, when the water-floods overflow them, and the deep is ready to swallow them up, they are still upholden by a deeply inwrought conviction, that *“the sufferings of this
“present time are not worthy to be compared with
“the glory that shall be revealed in us.”*²

Here, then, is the secret of patience, and fortitude, and hope. Here lies the strength of self-denial, and godly resolution—in that fixed habit of mind, which looks not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; and learns to think lightly of things temporal, by contrasting their value with that of things eternal; enabled to appreciate that value in part, by its own experience of the joy and peace of heavenly-mindedness.

Let me now desire you to consider, in what degree your own habitual frame of mind answers to this description. How often do you seriously apply your thoughts to the difference between things temporal and eternal, with a view to your own personal interest in the question?

¹ 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17, 18.

² Romans viii. 18.

I know how difficult it is to acquire the habit of doing this; difficult even to the minister of religion, whose duty it is to inculcate it upon others, and whose calling of necessity withdraws him in great measure from those engagements and pursuits, which relate exclusively to things temporal; but to the man of the world, the slave of business, the votary of pleasure, the eager competitor for honours, it would seem to be well-nigh impossible. The instances, we fear, are too few, where an ardent pursuit of the things which are seen is found to be compatible with an habitual and earnest contemplation of the things which are not seen and are eternal. Nevertheless, it may be, that an active and careful discharge of all the duties of social, political, or professional life, does not hinder a man from serious and systematic attention to the things of eternity. Were it otherwise, we might well inquire, looking to the relations of society and the duties which they impose upon a great majority of mankind, "*Who then can be saved?*" The answer is at hand; "*With men this is impossible; but* "*with God all things are possible.*"¹ His grace will enable us to overcome all the hindrances to seriousness and heavenly meditation, and to discern through all the mists which are generated by an atmosphere of earthly cares and

¹ St. Matt. xix, 26.

influences, the glories of the heavenly Jerusalem. But that grace must be anxiously sought for, and no opportunities of obtaining or improving it should be neglected.

Persons who are much engaged in what is, or is thought to be, the necessary business of life, should make it a point of conscience to devote some stated times to the duty of communing with God, and of placing before their minds the great things of the eternal world. It has excited my surprise, that in places, where there is daily service in the Church, more persons are not found to profit by the opportunity which is thus afforded them, of collecting their thoughts and of hearing the Word of God, and of solemnly imploring His blessing, before entering upon the business of the day. Without presuming to impose this upon any persons as a duty, I may yet suggest that it were surely well, if they prepared themselves for employing two-thirds of their waking hours upon things temporal, by turning their thoughts, for one short half-hour, to things eternal. It may be said, that they can do this in private, and that their secret devotions will answer the purpose. But it is not so. The stated appointments with God; the open resorting to His sanctuary; the solemn acts of worship performed in the presence of our brethren; are calculated, in some respects more than our

private devotions, to solemnize our minds, and to exert a salutary influence upon the transactions of the day.

Finally, brethren, think what the state of the Christian world would be, if all men were seriously and earnestly to look at the things that are not seen and are eternal: think what your own condition would be, with reference to your future and everlasting state; how much better you would be prepared for it, how much more likely, therefore, to secure its rewards. If heaven were indeed a present reality to your souls, as by prayer, and the study of God's Word, and the faithful use of its ordinances, it might be made to every one of you; the faint dawn of its glories, which would even now tinge all your thoughts and actions with celestial light, would gradually expand into the brightness of the perfect day; and your passage from this vale of tears into the unknown world, would be an easy transition from glory to glory; from lower degrees of holiness and felicity to that perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, which will be the final reward and everlasting destiny of the just. Once more, then, consider all that is implied in the contrast between temporal and eternal. *“ Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, “ what manner of persons ought ye to be in all “ holy conversation and godliness. We, according*

*“to His promise, look for new heavens and
“a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.
“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for
“such things, be diligent that ye may be
“found of Him in peace, without spot, and
“blameless.”*¹

¹ 2 Peter iii. 11, 13, 14.

SERMON XVIII.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH AND THE DUTIES OF
ITS MEMBERS.

EPHESIANS II. 19—22.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners ; but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God ; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone ; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord : in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

IN how noble and affecting a strain of congratulation does the apostle address the members of the Church at Ephesus. How worthy of an inspired messenger of God, speaking to reasonable beings, the heirs of immortality ! The contrast between their former state, and that into which they had been admitted through the gate of baptism, is sketched with a boldness and distinctness of metaphor highly characteristic of the glowing imagination and ardent

charity of the writer: "Ye were aliens and strangers; aliens from Him who is the only source of happiness and safety: ye are now reconciled to Him; naturalized in His kingdom; adopted into His family; your sentence of banishment remitted; your attainder and outlawry reversed; your rich inheritance restored, and that, too, with augmented privileges and blessings." What grace and mercy on the part of God; how blessed a change for those who are its objects! Oh, that we might hope to see the day, when these truly apostolic words of gratulation might be addressed to the thousands, nay, millions, of our fellow-countrymen, or fellow-subjects, who are at this moment, except as to profession, and outward, unknown, unregarded privileges, strangers and foreigners, aliens from the spiritual Israel of God, the subjects and slaves of Satan!

In the words of my text we have a condensed and most impressive description of the Church of God; its divine origin, its broad and deep and immovable foundation, its comprehensive economy, the process of its growth, and the purpose of its institution. It is the city of the living God; the commonwealth of saints; built upon the rock of eternal truth; that truth which has been revealed by the Holy Spirit through prophets and apostles, illustrated, completed, realized, and everlastingly confirmed by

the Son of God Himself. It comprises within the pale of its citizenship, and in the enjoyment of its immunities and privileges, both Jew and Gentile: its boundaries are extended, and its walls built up by the daily addition of those who are to be saved. They are brought into the Church, spiritually united to the Saviour, and sanctified unto obedience by the Holy Spirit, who thus accomplishes the immediate objects of the Church's existence. Those objects are: the maintenance, extension, and final consummation of the Redeemer's kingdom upon earth. In truth, the Church itself is that kingdom, as far as it is visible to human eyes; and the growth of Christ's kingdom is commensurate with that of the true Church.

These objects are too vast and complicated to be achieved by the isolated and desultory efforts of His individual servants, how great soever their zeal and energy; not to be accomplished by the wisdom of man, nor by any machinery of his construction, but provided for by Jesus Christ Himself, the Head over all from the beginning. He founded a great spiritual polity, the laws and discipline whereof were suggested by the Holy Spirit to those wise master-builders, to whom had been confided the task of framing and governing the Church. No words can convey a more exalted notion of the dignity and usefulness of

the Church, than St. Paul's declaration, that it was to be the means of developing to those heavenly intelligences who enjoy the more immediate presence of God, that secret which they have desired to look into, the mystery of God's love in the scheme of man's redemption: "*To the intent,*" he says, "*that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.*"¹

The saints then, those who have been taken into covenant with God, and made in baptism subjects of His spiritual kingdom, are spoken of as citizens belonging to a certain state and commonwealth, separate and distinct from the rest of mankind; members of a family or household, with respect to which all others are aliens and strangers. They are parts of a building which is of no uncertain plan, nor of vague and indefinite proportions, but the whole is "*fitly framed together;*" with the most perfect coherence and symmetry of all its parts; yet gradual, as to the process of its growth; "*growing unto an holy temple in the Lord,*" the antitype and perfect pattern of that majestic temple made with hands, the services of which were upholden by the authority of Jehovah, speaking to the Fathers by the prophets; as those of the spiritual temple are

¹ Ephesians iii. 10.

commanded and perpetuated by the Incarnate Word, by whom He has spoken to us, through the writings of His apostles.

Thus, then, the Church of God, viewed in its limited and preparatory state, and in the fulness of its spiritual development (although not yet seen in its final completeness and gloriousness of its beauty, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing), is manifestly a distinct and integral body, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. It follows from this account of the Church's constitution, that it is *one*. Its unity is necessary to its integrity; and upon this truth depend many of the duties which its members are bound to perform; as well as the right solution of those questions of Church government and discipline which have so long divided and distracted the Christian world.

When the evangelical prophet foreshadows the growth and comprehensiveness of the Messiah's kingdom, he does not represent it as consisting in the establishment of a number of different communities of God's servants in different parts of the world, unconnected with one another; but he speaks of the gradual enlargement of its boundaries from one common centre; the spiritual body increasing on every side; but without any infringement of its integrity or unity: "*Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let*

*“them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitation ; spare not ; lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes : for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left ; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.”*¹ *“By one Spirit,”* says St. Paul, *“are we all baptized into one body ; whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free ; and have been all made to drink of one Spirit.”* — *“We, being many, are one bread and one body.”*² *“Ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”*³ *“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling : one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”*⁴ Hence results the duty, which the same apostle enforces upon every member of the body spiritual ; a duty, upon the right performance of which, the growth of Christ’s Church and the diffusion of Gospel light and holiness so materially depend ; namely, that *“speaking the truth in love, they may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ ; from whom the whole body, fitly framed together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh*

¹ Isaiah liv. 2, 3.

³ Galatians iii. 28.

² 1 Cor. xii. 13, and x. 17.

⁴ Ephesians iv. 4—6.

*“increase of the body unto the edifying of itself
“in love.”*¹

The Church of Christ then is a distinct body, distinct from an unbaptized and unbelieving world; and it is one, not in locality, nor in forms which are not of divine or apostolical appointment; but one in its fundamental principles and essence. It is one body, as the Bible is one book, consisting of many parts, but informed by one Spirit, and the vehicle of one system of divine truth. St. Paul enumerates the leading points of that oneness and community: *“One Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, “one baptism, one God and Father of all;”*² faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, drawn from and grounded upon the written Word; one door of admission into the same state of gifts, privileges and duties; the opening thereof entrusted to His chosen messengers. To these the apostle elsewhere adds another feature, one solemn rite expressive and confirmatory of unity, and commemorative of Him, in whom and with whom all are to be united; *“The cup of “blessing which we bless, is it not the communion “of the blood of Christ? The bread which we “break, is it not the communion of the body of “Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and “one body: for we are all partakers of that one “bread.”*³ The unity of the Church does not

¹ Ephesians iv. 15, 16. . . ² Ibid. iv. 4, 5, 6. ³ 1 Cor. x. 16, 17.

consist solely in a communion of faith and love, but in a joint participation in the ordinances appointed by its Divine Head. Although the former be a duty, it is not the whole duty of Christians; which is, to be joined together as members of the same body, animated by one principle of spiritual life, labouring together for the same ends, by the same methods, "*one faith and one baptism,*" as well as "*one Lord and one Spirit.*" The obligation, therefore, to preserve the Church's unity, implies a joining together of all its members in the common and public acts of religion. With respect to the ordinances instituted by our blessed Lord Himself, or by the holy apostles, acting with the authority which He delegated to them, this duty is plain and unquestionable, and binds the universal Church. With regard to those which are of the Church's appointment, in every country wherein a true branch of the Church is planted, uniformity is indispensably required for the ends of edification, and it is moreover an expression and indication of unity within, and serves to strengthen and maintain it. This is that outward beauty of holiness which leads men to acknowledge, that "*Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity in itself,*"¹ and then to seek for the principle of that unity, and the source of its strength within; "*to behold the beauty of*

¹ Psalm cxxii. 3.

“*the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.*”¹

From hence follows, by a very clear and obvious inference, the duty of our adherence to that decent order of the Church, which was established by those prudent and holy men who remodelled our Liturgy upon the ancient pattern, retaining, as they declared, not “dark nor dumb ceremonies, but” such “that every man may understand what they do mean and to what use they do serve. So that it is not like that they in time to come should be abused as other have been. For every country should use such ceremonies as they shall think best to the setting forth of God’s honour and glory, and to the reducing of the people to a most perfect and godly living, without error or superstition; and that they should put away other things, which from time to time they perceive to be most abused.”²

Let us now revert to the apostolic description of the privileges we enjoy as having been incorporated into that mystical body, whereof the Lord Jesus is the Head. We are made “*fellow-citizens with the saints.*” We are knit together with God’s elect in one communion and fellowship; chosen and called out of a sinful world into the family of God, and furnished therein with the means of being saints in the highest

¹ Psalm xxvii. 4.

² Preface to the Prayer Book, “Of Ceremonies.”

sense of the word, holy in deed as well as name. And herein we see very clearly not only the advantage, but the indispensableness of admission into the true Church. This most important feature in the Christian economy is wholly overlooked by those persons who contend, that as every man must give account of himself to God, and must stand or fall by his own faith, his religion is a purely personal and individual question between God and himself; and that by the light of God's Word, and the aid of the Holy Spirit, he may, as an individual, work out his own salvation, though with fear and trembling. Such persons do not trouble themselves about the Church, whether they are in communion with a true branch of it or not, or indeed whether they belong to it at all, as a visible Church. They are in communion, as they think, with Jesus Christ, in the inner man, united to Him in faith and love, and as to any relation to Him in and through any religious body, or society, that is a matter comparatively unimportant. But this is plainly an assumption of the very point in question. It assumes that Jesus Christ has not appointed any other medium of approach to and union with Him, than the written Word, and mental prayer for spiritual help. We maintain, on the contrary, that the institution of baptism plainly supposes the existence of a distinct spiritual body into which the baptized are

initiated, and of which they are made, by baptism, constituent members, endowed with certain spiritual gifts, invested with certain privileges, and bound to certain duties. This distinct body is spoken of by the apostles in language which cannot be explained but on the supposition of its existence as such. It is the community of the baptized, the "*household of God*," the "*body of Christ*;" all the members of which have duties to perform one towards another, bearing upon the health and increase of the entire body, and upon their own growth in grace, and the gradual perfecting of their inner life. Does any man desire to realize to himself the promised indwelling of the Spirit? He must seek for that blessing, as a member of this spiritual corporation, and be "*builded together*" with the saints, "*for an habitation of God through the Spirit*." Does he seek to be united with his Saviour in the inner man? He must first put on Christ in baptism, and then join with his brethren in the common use of the appointed means of maintaining and strengthening that union. The very name of that sacred mystery whereby believers are really, though spiritually united to Christ, or rather have that union made more intimate and perfect, excludes the notion of religious isolation. Hear once more the words of St. Paul: "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?*"

“The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread;” an assertion, which, I may remark by the way, seems to me most clearly to exclude the notion of a corporal presence of Christ’s natural flesh and blood in the Holy Communion. The redemption wrought for us by Jesus Christ is a common redemption; and the means, whereby the benefits of that redemption are brought home to individual sinners, are common means in a twofold sense; common, as being applicable to all, and as being used by every man in common with others, and with relation to common duties and hopes. The operations of the Holy Spirit in the economy of man’s redemption are of a twofold kind; particular and individual, but also general and common. Every Christian, admitted by baptism into the family of God, is placed thereby in a peculiar and immediate relation to his Heavenly Father; but he also contracts a new and sacred relation towards the family into which he has been adopted, and is connected by the operation of the Holy Ghost with the entire body of Christ. This community of privileges and duties leaves ample scope for a variety of those gifts and graces, which the Holy Spirit, who maintains the Church’s interior life, *“distributes to every man severally as He*

“*will*,” and for various degrees of growth and fruitfulness ; some an hundred, some sixty, some thirty fold : but it is in virtue of that community that those gifts are imparted, and those graces made effectual. Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit in the Church, dispenses them to its individual members, as the sap is drawn up from the earth by a secret process of assimilation, and flows through the stem to all the branches, and causes them to germinate and bring forth fruit in due season. And no person, who, presuming on his own reason or capacities of good, thinks fit to isolate himself from this community, and to renounce the rights of saintly citizenship, can show a clear title to Gospel rights and privileges here, nor to an inheritance hereafter with the saints in light.

Is it possible for us, my brethren, to look at the constitution of our own nature, and not to perceive the wisdom and goodness of God in adapting to it the provision which He has made in the Church for its recovery and restoration? He, who at the first made man, and “*knew what was in man, and needed not that any should testify of man,*” has graciously consulted both the weakness and the strength of His servants, in the means which He employs to raise them from their fallen state, and to bring them, through Himself, to their Father. How suitable is the economy of grace, as to its instrumental

appliances, to the constitution of man's nature, which under all circumstances seeks support and sympathy from without ! How natural it is, that man's social instincts and tendencies, by the carrying out of which he fulfils the purposes of his being as one of this world's denizens, and is a useful and happy member of the great family of mankind,—those instincts and tendencies which are the foundation-principles and moving springs of domestic and social life, and of civil government ;—how natural, so to speak, that they should be called into action with reference to man's inner life, and be embodied, as it were, in that great spiritual polity, which was founded by the Divine Author of our salvation, for the purpose of knitting together in one all those who are to be saved, in order to His own glory, the common good of all, and their own individual salvation. How consolatory to the weakness of our nature, to feel, that in our relation to a just and holy God we do not stand alone ; that we are not left entirely to our own desires, and endeavours, and prayers, but that as fellow-members of the same heavenly commonwealth, we have the benefit of mutual prayer and intercession, and of the blessing promised to the gathering together of the saints, even the presence of the Saviour, and the indwelling of the Father and of the Son by the Spirit.

The Church, then, is not simply a society of

men, formed on considerations of expediency, for the purpose of mutual protection, encouragement, and edification: but it is a body, which conveys to all its members, from one Divine Head, by the agency of one pervading and informing Spirit, certain gifts, and confers upon them, in virtue of such membership, certain inestimable privileges, which they cannot be sure of obtaining without it. It is the appointed conduit through which the blessings of the Gospel flow in certain definite channels. It is the outward means of conveying to us the inward graces divided by the Spirit to every man. It is the appointed agency by which sinners are brought to a knowledge of the common salvation, endued with a capacity of profiting by it, and built up, through successive stages of increasing light and strength, to the stature of a perfect man. It is therefore a question of momentous importance to every man, whether the Church with which he is in communion be a true branch of Christ's Holy Catholic Church; and the marks whereby he may know it to be so are these, that "the pure Word of God is preached" therein, and "the Sacraments are duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same."¹ Where this is the case, although there may be faults and

¹ Nineteenth Article.

blemishes in that Church, if they be such as touch not the fundamentals of the faith, we cannot but think that he who renounces its communion incurs the guilt of schism. That mere faultiness in discipline will not justify such a renunciation, it is scarcely necessary to prove; but it is not even every error in doctrine which will necessitate, much less warrant it. "The bare teaching, *ex cathedrâ*, of the doctrinal errors of the Church of Rome" (I quote the words of Bishop Sander-son), "inasmuch as they do not overthrow the foundation, but *ex consequenti* and indirectly, is not of itself enough to enforce, or justify, an outward separation from her; but the imposing those errors on the consciences of men, to be believed as of necessity, doth not only justify a separation already made, but also bindeth, *sub mortali*, all true Christians to such a separation." Still less is such a renunciation to be justified, on the ground that any authority, short of the authority of the Church itself, has pronounced any opinion, or done any act, which may seem to cast a shade over the brightness of her teaching, while that teaching, in its acknowledged and authoritative institutes, remains unchanged. With regard to our own Church, let us be thankful that her light still shines in all its strength and purity in her Confessions and Liturgical Offices; that every one who ministers at her altars must of necessity hold up that light to

the faithful as the very light of truth ; and that it still burns on the candlestick of pure gold in the midst of the sanctuary, to give "*light unto all that are in the house.*"¹ Shall we, my brethren, while the Church itself continues to speak with authority the same unvarying language, and to hold fast, as a Church, the form of sound words ; and while we ourselves are left at full liberty to interpret her mind according to what we believe to be the scale of truth ; shall we, if some think themselves set free to put a different sense upon her teaching in some one of its features, and to maintain what we may deem to be erroneous ; shall we, on that account, renounce her authority, and throw ourselves into the arms of a Church, which, if it would bind down its members more stringently to the canon of truth in one direction, will bind us down with equal stringency to the maintenance and propagation of deadly heresies in another ? Shall we, in order to avoid laxity and coldness, rush into idolatry ?

O my brethren, let us not abuse the goodness of God by slighting and casting from us the great spiritual privileges we enjoy as members of a true branch of Christ's holy Catholic Church, whose defects (for what branch of that Church is free from defects ?) are those of discipline rather than of doctrine ; but let us rather

¹ St. Matthew v. 15.

avail ourselves all the more earnestly of our own undisputed right to teach and preach the whole of that truth which is the Church's sacred deposit, and use our best endeavours to remove the blemishes and repair the flaws which may seem to disfigure, or weaken, the shrine which contains it.

I would desire you, dear brethren, to consider whether such doubts should be suffered to cross your minds at a time when, if there be something to alarm and disquiet, there is surely much more to encourage and console us; at a time when the Divine Head of the Church appears (we speak with all humility) to be acknowledging the legitimacy of that branch of it which is planted in this realm by signal marks of His favour; not by amplifying its worldly honour, nor by enlarging its endowments, nor by augmenting its temporal power; but by awakening its spiritual energies, by reviving its inner life, by rekindling in its members somewhat of the Church's ancient warmth of piety and charity; by giving it both the will and the power to "*lengthen its cords, and strengthen its stakes,*" "*and to break forth on the right hand and on the left.*" Is it a token of God's disfavour, of His having withdrawn, or being about to withdraw the light of His countenance, when the Vine which His right hand has planted, after a long season, wherein its growth was

stunted, and the heavenly sap flowed languidly and feebly through its veins, has begun to give evidence of renewed vitality and vigour, to “*stretch out her branches unto the sea, and her boughs unto the river,*” so that the nations of the earth are seeking for shelter under the shadow thereof?

Have we not thankfully to acknowledge the goodness of God towards the Church of this country, in permitting it to send out, within the last ten years, fourteen additional bishops to preside over its distant branches, and in blessing the labours of those self-denying and devoted men with an almost unlooked-for measure of success? This, too, be it remembered, by the Church’s inherent energy, without assistance, almost without encouragement from the State. Surely it is not the language of presumptuous confidence, but the suggestion of faith, which reason cannot gainsay, to confess with all humility and thankfulness, “*Truly this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.*”¹

Again, are there no indications of the existence of a true Church, faithful to its appointed work, in the efforts which have been made of late to bring into its bosom, and to provide with heavenly nourishment, the multitudes of souls, called indeed by her name, and for the most

¹ Psalm cxviii. 23.

part, it may be, made her children by baptism, but from that moment treated as strangers and foreigners, ignorant of her maternal care, suffered to remain in an almost worse than heathen state, left to perish in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity? Are not the churches and schools, which are now so many centres of light and holiness in those regions where the powers of darkness long held undisputed sway over the votaries and slaves of Mammon, so many trophies which the Church Militant has been permitted to erect over the enemies of man's salvation? Is it not the Church which has of late lifted up her trumpet-voice, and told the rich and powerful of the duties they owe to the poor, and of the dangers which have arisen, and of the ruin which must ensue from the neglect of those duties?

For my own part, I cannot doubt, but that the great Spirit of evil, the Prince of the power of this world, who looks "with jealous leer malign" upon the Reformed Church of England, as destined, it may be, and called upon by her singular opportunities and means, to be the evangelizer of the world, and the chosen instrument of beating down his strongholds, and carrying forward into his dominions the kingdom of the Redeemer, is using special efforts to weaken her capacities of good, and regarding with complacency those intestine divisions,

which prey upon her vitals, and tend to paralyse her powers of action.

Let us unite in earnest prayer, that the Church may indeed be strengthened to perform her proper office, or rather, that it may be performed by the Holy Spirit working in the Church: that of bringing all men to a sense of the principles and duties of the Communion of Saints, teaching them to regard themselves and others as members one of another, and of one mystical body, Christ Himself being the Head; so that, losing sight of self in the community of Christian blessings and duties, we may seek, not our own, but every man another's good, each esteeming other better than themselves, and the glory of God more than all. And let it be a subject of our daily prayers, that the Church of God may be "peaceably ordered by His governance, and serve Him in all godly quietness;" that being always "preserved from false apostles, it may be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors;" that being "not, like children, carried away with every blast of vain doctrine, we may be established in the truth of His holy Gospel;" that "all bishops and pastors may diligently preach His holy Word, and the people obediently follow the same;" and that as He has built His "Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the

head corner stone," so we may "be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made an holy temple acceptable unto Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

SERMON XIX.

THE POWERS AND DUTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN
MINISTRY.

ACTS XX. 28.

Take heed, therefore, unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.

OUR blessed Saviour's thrice-repeated charge to Peter, "*Feed my flock,*" is here given by St. Paul to the elders of the Church at Ephesus, with a motive added to the precept. The Holy Ghost had made them overseers; therefore they had authority to feed the flock; and that flock having been purchased with the blood of the Great Shepherd Himself, and being very precious in His sight, to watch over it and to feed it became their most sacred duty. Our Lord had said to His apostles, "*As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you;*" and they manifestly understood this mission to confer upon them the

right, and to lay upon them the obligation, of sending forth others to the same work, and of transmitting to them the privilege and the duty of perpetuating a succession of persons, to whom more especially should belong the office of overseeing the flock and of feeding the Church of God. These are spoken of in the epistles of the holy Apostles, and in the record of their acts, as a distinct body of men entrusted with specific duties, and invested with peculiar authority ; their duties being those which specially pertain to the offices of messengers, watchmen, and stewards of the Lord ; as messengers to declare the will and purposes of God ; as watchmen to forewarn ; as stewards to feed and provide for the Lord's family ; their authority being such as belongs to guides, instructors, spiritual rulers, entrusted with the right of opening not merely the gate of knowledge, but the door of entrance into the Church of Christ and family of God ; and, as of ministering to the faithful, so, of withholding from the profane, the appointed means of grace. They are distinguished by very remarkable and significant titles ; and from these alone, considering that the persons who employed them wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, might be inferred the necessity and sacredness of the ministerial office, the responsibility belonging thereto, and the honour which it may justly claim. They are called the

Angels of the Churches; ambassadors, charged with the message and ministry of reconciliation; stewards, or dispensers of the mysteries of God; watchmen and overseers of the Lord's flock; shepherds, preachers, builders, planters, scribes, instructed for the kingdom of heaven. The necessity of their office, the nature of its duties, the conduct of ministers towards God's people, and the people's conduct towards them, might all be deduced from the ideas implied in these designations. The very notion of a church involves that of ordinances; and ordinances require persons to administer them; and therefore our Lord Jesus Christ made provision for both. He did not appoint a work to be done without appointing also the workmen to do it. As He declared that His Gospel was to be preached to all nations, and that men were to be admitted into His Church by baptism, so He commissioned His apostles to preach and to baptize. And since the work was of perpetual necessity, His commission carried with it the power of ordaining others to succeed the apostles in the performance of that work. The office of the ministry was instituted for objects which are of perpetual importance, and therefore its duties are of perpetual obligation, and its authority of perpetual force. To proclaim repentance and the remission of sins; to turn sinful men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan

unto God; the perfecting of the saints; the edifying of the body of Christ; the dispensing to fainting souls of the wholesome nourishment of God's Word; and the spiritual food and sustenance of Christ's body and blood; these are works which must be done in the Church until the Church shall have fully accomplished the ends of its institution, and all the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of the Lord and of His Christ. So long, therefore, must there be a succession of Christian ministers, handing down from generation to generation their torches, kindled at the fire which burns within the sanctuary; which they are to keep alive, and to bear forth into the darkness of the outer world.

The appointment of the Christian ministry is a result of the wisdom and the goodness of God. His Word would not be made the subject of study and meditation; His Sacraments would not be sought for nor dispensed; His Sabbaths would not be sanctified; nor His holy name honoured; nor His laws obeyed; were it not that a peculiar order of men has been set apart from the rest of their brethren, and specially entrusted with a dispensation of the Word and Sacraments; men duly prepared for the important task; and consecrated to the work, with solemn prayer, by persons having authority to call and send persons into the Lord's vine-

yard: divorced from secular cares and duties; and devoted entirely to the work of their holy calling; the work of realizing, in the Church, to individual sinners, the benefits which Jesus Christ, by His precious blood-shedding, has obtained for all.

If it be said that this work may be done by others, as well as by ministers, we answer, it is indeed most true, that all believers in Christ are bound to edify, to instruct, to comfort, and to pray for one another. Every member of the mystical body of Christ ought to labour for the good of the whole. As every man hath received the gift, so is he bound to minister the same to others, as a good steward of the manifold grace of God. And if all men were indeed to fulfil their duty in this respect, the work of the ministry would be lightened, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth accelerated. But still, the object to be accomplished would not be accomplished with the same certainty and regularity. The truth would not be preached with the same authority, nor produce the same effect upon those who, from the constitution of human nature and human society, must be content to learn the truth from others, and to submit to their authority as guides. A common man may perhaps be able to resolve rightly a question of law; but the sentence of a judge will command greater respect, and quiet the

doubts of the inquirer. Private Christians may converse with one another upon the meaning of Holy Scripture, upon the truths and precepts of their religion; but ministers speak in the name, and with the authority of the Church: and they have Scripture warrant for so doing; seeing that they have inherited the commission which St. Paul gave to Titus, and which the apostles gave to all their successors: "*These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority; let no man despise thee.*"¹ Nor would private Christians carry on the difficult and important work with equal ability and efficiency. A special and peculiar education is required, for qualifying a man to become an able and trustworthy interpreter of the Word of God; and to "*bring forth out of his treasure things new and old.*"² Whatever care is requisite, to prepare men for any other calling, less cannot be required for the duties of that which is the most arduous, the most delicate, the most important of all. But not to dwell upon this consideration, we have further to observe, that there is no promise of a special blessing on the work, to any other persons than those who are duly commissioned to take it in hand: but to them there is such a promise; and the remembrance of it ought to be very animating and awakening to ministers them-

¹ Titus ii. 15.

² St. Matthew xiii. 52.

selves; and very consolatory and encouraging to those who are committed to their pastoral charge. A well prepared and conscientious clergyman may take to himself, though with a humbling sense of his own inferiority, what St. Paul said to the Corinthians, "*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament.*"¹ He is sure of the presence of his Divine Master, to bless his ministrations, when duly and faithfully performed; and to give them effect: for he who teaches those that are baptized to observe all things, whatsoever Christ has commanded, himself setting the example, has a part in the promise, "*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*"²

The Gospel, preached by its lawful ministers, comes to their hearers "*not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.*"³ They speak, not in their own individual personality, as isolated members of the body spiritual; but as cooperating with God Himself. "*We are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry: ye are God's building.*"⁴

On the other hand, there will surely be a readier disposition, on the part of Christian people, to look for spiritual guidance, and

¹ 2 Corinthians iii. 5, 6.

³ 1 Thessalonians i. 5.

² St. Matthew xxviii. 20.

⁴ 1 Corinthians iii. 9.

counsel, and comfort, to those whose peculiar duty it is to give it, and who are fitted for that duty by their previous education and habitual pursuits, than to men like themselves, much engaged in worldly affairs, and distracted by widely different occupations. I would put the question to any serious person, who is prevented by the business of his calling from spending much of his time in scriptural researches and meditation, whether it is not a subject of much comfort and relief, that he is privileged not indeed to commit his conscience to any man's keeping, nor to repose upon any assumed infallibility of an earthly judge of truth, but to have recourse for instruction and counsel, for the solution of his doubts and the confirmation of his hopes, to one who has been solemnly appointed to feed the Church of God, and to watch over his soul as one that must give account; one who dwells as it were apart from the world's tumult and frivolity in the secret place of God's tabernacle, and in the light and holiness of His sanctuary. What the prophet said of the Levitical priesthood is applicable in a still higher and more comprehensive sense to the Christian ministry: "*The priest's lips should keep knowledge; and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.*"¹

¹ Malachi ii. 7.

Further, it is as necessary, for the sake of order and decency, that there should be a distinct body of men, set apart for the service of God and the instruction of their brethren, as it is, that certain times should be appointed for public and common worship, and certain places dedicated exclusively to the purposes of religion. If all were at liberty to take upon themselves the office of ministering and teaching in the Church, the least qualified would commonly be the most forward to undertake it; and the result would be disastrous to the peace of the Church and to the purity of her doctrine. But “*God is not the Author of confusion, but of peace, as in all Churches of the saints.*”¹

This will be still more apparent, if we consider the nature of those duties for the performance of which the Christian ministry has been instituted. “*Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.*” How expressive, and how comprehensive is that term, “*to feed the Church of God*”! What is it, but to enter upon the duties of that office which was once filled by the Son of God Himself, the great Shepherd of the sheep; who “*came to seek and to save that which was lost*”; to bring the wanderers back into the fold of God, to lead them by

¹ 1 Corinthians xiv. 33.

His holy precepts and faultless example, to feed them with His Word, His Spirit, His body and blood, and to rescue them from the adversary who seeks to devour them? In all these particulars we are to do what Jesus Christ did, though with infinitely inferior means, ability, and success. We are to deliver the glad tidings of salvation; to offer up continually the spiritual sacrifice of prayer and praise in the name and behalf of the Church, and to bless the people in God's name; to minister the sacraments, by which the flock are marked for His, and His promises visibly signed and sealed, and His grace secretly conveyed to them; to exercise the power of binding and loosing, by spiritual censure or absolution, the contumacious or the penitent sinner. We are thus in Christ's stead, acting with His delegated authority, as His under-shepherds and stewards, dispensing to His flock the whole counsel of God, and applying it to their soul's nourishment and health, by instruments and means of His appointment; not pursuing methods of edification of our own devising; but those which the Lord Himself and His apostles have prescribed; not bringing forth out of our treasures any new inventions of "*our own or other men's wisdom*;" but imparting to our flocks the sacred deposit of immutable truth, revealed in the Word of God, and preserved by the Church as a faithful keeper and witness, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

It is of great importance that both we who are called to this work of the ministry, and they to whom we are to minister, should entertain just and adequate notions of the nature of our office, of the duties which it lays upon us, and of the authority with which it invests us. Our own thoughts should be chiefly directed to the solemn responsibilities of our calling; those of our hearers to its authority, and to the benefits to be derived therefrom to themselves. We cannot think too highly of our calling, as messengers, stewards, and watchmen of the Lord; but if we take too much upon ourselves "*as being lords over God's heritage*;" if we insist too strongly on our spiritual prerogatives, as giving us power over the consciences of our people, and entitling us to an implicit and uninquiring submission of their understandings and wills, we shall be in danger either of offending them by our unreasonable pretensions, and of forfeiting the respect which is justly due to our office; or, on the other hand, of accustoming them to look to us, rather than to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of their faith, as the medium of their approach to God, and of ascribing more to our ministrations than to the divine truths of that Gospel, which, when applied to the souls of men in the Church, is "*the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.*"¹ "*By grace we are*

¹ Romans i. 16.

“*saved through faith,*”¹ that is, through faith in Christ crucified; and that faith must be grounded upon a knowledge of what Christ has done and suffered for man’s salvation; and that knowledge it is the special office of Christ’s ministers to impart to His people; drawing it from the pure fountain of truth in the written Word: for “*how shall they believe in Him, of whom they have not heard; and how shall they hear without a preacher?*”² And the sum and substance of that knowledge is salvation by faith in a crucified Saviour. It is true that the plan of redemption comprises many features, which must be developed by the teacher, and embraced by the hearer, in order to the fulness and completeness of Christian faith: but they all tend to that great doctrine as to a centre, and terminate therein as their ultimate object; and no preaching, which does not bear upon it, nor tend that way, can be characterized as a faithful or profitable dispensation of the Word of God, nor as ministering wholesome food to the hearer’s soul. In this sense we must be prepared to say, with St. Paul, “*I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified,*”³ labouring, as for the most important of all objects, to bring our people also to “*know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death.*”⁴

¹ Eph. ii. 8. ² Romans x. 14. ³ 1 Cor. ii. 2. ⁴ Philipp. iii. 10.

There exists in some persons a disposition to magnify unduly certain features of the ministerial office, to the disparagement and neglect of others. Some, for instance, place the efficacy of that office, if not its essence, in preaching; to which its other duties, they think, are subordinate; while some are inclined to think and speak too lightly of preaching, as compared with common prayer and the administration of the sacraments. But both have their place in the scheme of ministerial duty; and they are not to be contrasted, nor compared with each other; but viewed as parts of a perfect whole, the absence of either of which would impair its integrity and efficiency. It is true, that preaching, as the term is commonly used, meaning thereby not merely the reading of God's Holy Word, but the exposition and enforcement of its truths and precepts, is not, as prayer and the sacraments are, necessary to salvation; but it cannot be denied, that preaching is the appointed instrument of edification, the ordinary means of awakening sinners, of enlightening the ignorant, of confirming the doubtful, and of bringing all within the range of those spiritual influences, which are shed abroad in the Church's ordinances, and especially in the sacraments of grace. That our own Church ascribes to preaching a high value and importance, appears from the solemn charge given

to those who are to be admitted to the holy office of priesthood (for she does not ordinarily, nor without special leave, entrust the privilege to a deacon): "Take thou authority to preach the Word of God, and to minister the holy sacraments, in the congregation where thou shalt be lawfully appointed thereunto." And, indeed, it is a great and difficult work; one which, in an especial degree, demands that we take heed to ourselves in performing it; for in this part of our office we are left much more to our own knowledge and discretion, than in the other departments of ministerial duty. In leading the devotions of our people, and in dispensing to them the sacraments, we cannot greatly err, as long as we diligently observe and follow the precise directions which the Church has given us, according to the plain obligations of our duty, and our own express promise, made when we were ordained to the ministry, that we would give our "faithful diligence always so to 'minister the doctrine and sacraments, and the discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded; and as this Church and realm hath received the same.'"¹ In this case, the food to be given to our flock is provided for them by the Church herself; and all that we have to do, is to dispense it to them in the manner which she has prescribed. But

¹ Service for the Ordering of Priests.

in preaching, a much wider latitude is of necessity allowed; it not being possible to delineate and define all the various features of the grand system of Gospel truth, with the same precision which is practicable in the case of certain acts to be performed by us in our public ministrations. We promise generally, "out of the Scriptures to instruct the people committed to our charge, and to teach nothing, as required of necessity to eternal salvation, but that which we are persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture."¹ But then, in addition to this promise, we set our hands to a solemn declaration, that the Articles of Religion, which declare the sense in which the Church of England interprets Holy Scripture, are true, and agreeable to the Word of God; and, therefore, here our discretion is restrained and limited. We are bound to preach no doctrine at variance with those Articles, taken in their plain and literal meaning. Any other line of conduct than this, in the discharge of our duty as preachers of God's Word, would be inconsistent with the plainest rules of honesty, and a breach or evasion of our solemn engagement to the Church. We are bound, then, to feed the flock of God according to stated rules and methods, both of doctrine and discipline. Within the limits which these rules

¹ Service for the Ordering of Priests.

and methods prescribe, there is ample scope; as there is an urgent necessity, for the most varied learning, the most ardent zeal, the most unceasing activity.

It is obvious, that faithfulness in feeding the Church of God implies soundness in doctrine and discipline, and diligence in profiting by all the opportunities which our office affords, of ministering counsel and consolation, and, where necessary, reproof, without regarding worldly distinctions, to those for whose souls we are to watch, as having to give account; and especially a careful training up of the younger members of our flock in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, by catechetical instruction, and by superintending, as far as we have opportunity, the process of their education. But there are two branches of this duty, which, although they may not at first sight appear to pertain to the pastoral charge of feeding the Church of God, are indeed of the greatest importance. It is not only by preaching the Word of God to our people, and by dispensing His sacraments, that we are to provide for their growth in knowledge and grace; but by our praying for them and living for them. The apostles gave themselves continually to prayer, as well as to the ministry of the Word; and we know from the Epistles, how large a portion of their prayers was offered

for the spiritual well-being of their converts. An indispensable part of our daily office, as Christ's ministers, is prayer for ourselves, that we may be made equal to so difficult and important a work, for which none can be sufficient without the aid of the Holy Spirit; and prayer for those of whom we have the oversight, that their hearts may be opened to attend to the things which we deliver to them, and to receive and hold fast the unsearchable riches of Christ, which it is our privilege to make known to them.

But we are also bound to *live* for our people, so as to seal by our example the truth of the doctrines which we preach, "*being ensamples to the flock.*"¹ And if we are to live for our people, we must live amongst them and with them. It has always been a principle of the Church's discipline in this country, that they who are charged with the cure of souls should reside within the limits of their cure. Abuses, mostly originating in papal interference with that discipline, rendered it difficult in some cases to enforce such residence, and by degrees a great laxity of practice grew up. But it is now our plain and unquestionable duty to insist upon the residence of the clergy within their proper sphere of duty wherever it is practicable; and we may reasonably call upon all

¹ 1 St. Peter v. 3.

the members of our Church to cooperate with us in removing the difficulties which in particular parishes interfere with so necessary a provision. The clergyman should be an example to his flock in his habits of life, his daily walk and conversation: as the head of a family, as a member of society.

As in the elder Church of God, the sins of the priests made the people "*abhor the offering of the Lord,*" so on the other hand, under the new covenant, the personal virtues and godly example of Christian ministers adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour, and recommend it to the consciences and affections of their people. They are to be not only teachers, but guides; not only to point, but to lead the way to life. What disgrace can be greater than to merit the reproach, "*Thou which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?*"¹ What can be more terrible than the thought of seeing hereafter, on the left hand of the Judge, those whom, by the dissonance of our preaching and living, we have taught to regard religion as a fable, and lightly to esteem the Rock of their salvation? But what labour and pains, what study and watching, what self-denial and sacrifice, are too much to purchase for us the blessed conviction, that

¹ Romans ii. 21, 23.

we have lost, by our own fault, none of those whom Christ purchased with His own blood, and whom the Holy Ghost has entrusted to our keeping? What are the honours or praises, which can be showered upon us by the world, in comparison with the witness which will hereafter be given in our favour by blessed saints, whom the Judge will place on His right hand; "That was the faithful minister who shunned not to declare to us all the counsel of God; who dispensed to us in due season the true bread of life; who counselled us in difficulties, reproved us when we sinned, led us back into the right path when we went astray, strengthened our faith, animated our hopes, kindled our devotion, consoled us in sorrow, guided us by his example, helped us by his prayers, and smoothed our path through the troubles and trials of our transitory state, to the glory and blessedness of that which is eternal." Then shall the Chief Shepherd give to those faithful overseers of his flock "*a crown of glory that fadeth not away.*"

But if such be the purposes for which the ministry has been appointed, if such be the duties and rewards of the faithful shepherd, those whom he is deputed to guide and feed must surely have correlative duties to perform. The flock to whom he is charged to take heed, must look to him in the spirit of docility and

respect, and cooperate with him in his labours of piety and charity, and assist him with their prayers. They form a part of Christ's family, no less than he who is set over them in the Lord; members of one mystical body into which they have been incorporated by baptism; and every member of the spiritual household has his appropriate duties to fulfil, as well as those, who are set over the rest to give them meat in due season. All are concerned in the Church's purity and efficiency, and bound to promote them as they have opportunity. If it be the Church's office to provide the heavenly food of God's Word and sacraments, and all those ordinances which are requisite for the dispensation of truth and grace; and if it be the duty of her ministers to dispense them accordingly; it is in the same degree binding upon all her children to profit to the utmost by that provision, and not to neglect nor despise any of those appointments, by which she seeks to realize to individual Christians the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit.

Such, then, are the objects, and duties, and benefits of the Christian ministry; and those objects will be fully attained, where ministers are faithful to their trust, and the people know the value of their Christian privileges; the one carefully and affectionately leading, the other obediently and thankfully following beside

the still waters and in the green pastures, which lie within the enclosure of a true Church, and so walking onward together through paths of pleasantness to the entrance of that holy place, where the sounds of heavenly harps and voices solemnize an eternal Sabbath, and the glorified servants of God “*serve Him day and night in His temple.*”¹

¹ Rev. vii. 15.

SERMON XX.

CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE SANCTUARY.

ST. JOHN XX. 19.

Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus, and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

OUR blessed Saviour had declared to His disciples, as an encouragement to the duty of united prayer, “*If two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven : for where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them.*”¹ After such an assurance it would have been strange indeed, if, when their Lord and Master had been taken from them, the disciples had neglected the assembling of themselves together, although their first gathering must have taken place in some doubtfulness of spirit, with a trembling hope rather than a certain expectation of

¹ St. Matt. xviii. 19, 20.

its fulfilment. Mary Magdalene had just told them that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken gracious words to her, to be by her conveyed to them: "*I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.*"¹ But the intelligence was too wonderful and surprising to be received by them without any mixture of doubt or uncertainty. They were assembled, on the first evening after the resurrection, conversing probably on the import of that message which Mary had delivered to them, and praying, no doubt, that they might indeed again be blest by the personal presence of their Lord. With what force must this promise have recurred to their minds, when Jesus Himself suddenly stood in the midst of them, and said, "*Peace be unto you.*" He whom they had seen expire upon the cross, and laid with tears in the sepulchre, appeared amongst them in His own Person, and turned their sorrow into joy, their hope into certainty. He was dead, and is risen, was a truth, which at once stamped His teaching with authority, and His promises with reality. It was probably not less from a recollection of the arduous duties with which He had charged them, and a consciousness of their own inadequacy to the task, than from an involuntary feeling of joy at the reappearance of their departed Master and Friend, that the disciples, as

¹ St. John xx. 17.

St. John relates, "*were glad when they saw the Lord.*"¹ And well might they be glad to have again in the midst of them the Incarnate Son of God, mighty to defend and save, the light and life of the world. But were they the only persons who were to be partakers of that joy? We are apt to think, while reading the simple and touching relation of the Evangelist, that it is a history which has no direct bearing upon ourselves; that the privilege of the Saviour's actual presence was peculiar to His immediate disciples; and that we have no share in that gladness of heart which it occasioned in them. It must indeed be admitted that we can with difficulty, if at all, realize to ourselves the speciality of those feelings which must have animated the hearts of the assembled disciples at the sudden appearance of their crucified and risen Lord. And yet the consciousness of His actual presence is a source of joy to every true Christian, and where that consciousness is wholly wanting, there faith and love must be defective. We do not really believe His promises, if we never experience, though but imperfectly, their fulfilment. The promise of His especial presence amongst His disciples began to receive its accomplishment when the first followers of Christ were met together in the secret sanctuary of their upper rooms; but it has been ever since receiving its continued

¹ St. John xx. 20.

fulfilment in every penitent and believing and praying heart; and still more distinctly in every congregation of faithful men assembled for the purposes of prayer, whether in the hidden oratories of the primitive believers, caves and dens of the earth, or in the more sumptuous temples, reared by the pious munificence of a prosperous Church.

We have seen the incident which marked the evening of the first Lord's Day; and on the second, "*His disciples*," says the Evangelist, "*again were within—then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.*"¹ But the time was nigh at hand, when the bodily presence of the Saviour was to be withdrawn from His Church upon earth: "*I ascend unto My God and your God.*"² And yet that Church, a little flock in the midst of a naughty world, would require the countenance and protection of its Divine Head, even in a still greater degree than it did before the plan of the Gospel had been fully developed, and the hostility of the world provoked to the uttermost by its holy, and humbling, and self-denying requirements. And he had promised the continuance of that protection, and of His own presence, while He foretold the dangers and trials which would require it. After having encouraged His apostles with the assurance, that when He was

¹ St. John xx. 25.

¹ Ibid. ver. 17.

departed, He would send unto them the Comforter, He intimated to them that, through the medium of that Divine Instructor and Strengthen-er, He would Himself be present with His faithful servants, to uphold them in their difficulties: "*And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*"¹ But it is manifest from the words of our Lord Himself, and from the Sacred History, that there are times and occasions at which the Church may look for a more special fulfilment of that promise, which assures it of the presence of its glorified Head. It was again upon the Lord's Day, when the apostles were assembled with one accord, no doubt for the purposes of devotion, that this promise received its first fulfilment, and was sensibly realized in the descent of the Holy Ghost. It was upon the Lord's Day that the last survivor of the holy apostles received from the Spirit a special commission to warn the Churches of Asia, and a Revelation of the great events which were to mark the progress and establishment of the Redeemer's kingdom. These particulars in the history of the primitive Church, as they may fairly be considered to warrant the conclusion, that the Lord's Day was set apart from the first for the purposes of common worship and edification, so they appear to justify an inference, that Christians, in their

¹ St. Matthew xxviii. 20.

religious assemblies, while engaged in the work of prayer, may reasonably look to experience, in a more sensible and influential manner, the presence and benediction of their Saviour.

That the public and common worship of God is an ordinance of Divine appointment, can hardly be denied, even by those who would invalidate the authority of Sabbath observances. The temple at Jerusalem, although it was a place of sacrifice for the Jews alone, was to be "*a house of prayer for all nations*;"¹ a designation which our blessed Lord repeated and confirmed, when He drove out, with a holy indignation, the ungodly traffickers and money-changers from that court of the sanctuary which was specially appropriated to the religious services of the Gentile worshippers of Jehovah. His express promise, that He would be present with even two or three of His faithful followers met together in His Name, surely implies the continuance of religious assemblies in His Church, while it ensures to them a blessing. The apostle's prohibition, "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is*,"² at once asserts the duty of common worship, and condemns the neglect of it. And if there are not to be found in the Christian Scriptures more frequent and positive enforcements of this duty, it is manifestly because it is taken for granted,

¹ Isaiah lvi. 7; St. Mark xi. 17.

² Hebrews x. 25.

as one of those grand features of religion, which the Gospel Revelation was no otherwise to change than by rendering it more spiritual and profitable, and by supplying more powerful motives to its performance. It is, in truth, not only the result of a positive command of God, but a necessary consequence of man's social instincts and habits. If there be any religion at all in the world, it is impossible that in some form or other social worship should not be one expression of it. Since this is a natural result of our constitution, and a positive ordinance of our Creator, complied with by our blessed Lord Himself, and by His holy apostles; made the implied subject of a special promise by the One, and expressly enjoined upon Christians by the others; it is surely not unreasonable to expect, that in the observance of it we shall find a more than common measure of spiritual refreshment, and enjoy a more direct communion with the Great Head of the Church.

But let us look at this question somewhat more particularly. Our blessed Lord, although He declared that He would build His Church upon the rock of eternal truth, so that the gates of hell should not prevail against it, did not see fit to execute that work Himself, in His own Person; but as He commissioned His apostles to preach and teach the Gospel to all the world, and to baptize all people, thereby admitting them

into His spiritual kingdom, He did, by a necessary implication, authorize and empower them to construct the spiritual edifice of His Church, laying its foundations deep and firm upon the fulfilled predictions of prophets, and upon the truths declared to them by Himself, and more clearly revealed and developed by the Holy Ghost; Himself being "*the chief corner stone,*" which bound together the two covenants, and constituted the perfect symmetry of that building, upon whose forefront was to be inscribed "*Holiness unto the Lord,*"¹ whose "*walls*" were to be called "*Salvation,*" and its "*gates Praise.*"²

Our Lord said to His apostles, "*As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you.*"³ Nor was it less necessary, as the field of their labours expanded all around, for those holy men also to send forth others to the same work, and to delegate to their successors authority to provide for a continued supply of teachers. Therefore it was, that Titus was instructed to ordain elders in every city, and that we read of others, whom the Holy Ghost, acting by the apostles, had constituted overseers over the Church of God. Now it is clear, from many passages in the apostolic writings, that the persons so appointed were not merely to preach the Gospel to heathen nations, and convert unbelievers to the way of

¹ Zechariah xiv. 20.² Isaiah lx. 18.³ St. John xx. 21.

life; but to watch over those who had been so converted, as having charge of their souls: to instruct, encourage, rebuke, and console them; and to feed the Church of God, which He had purchased with His own blood, with the wholesome food of His Word and Sacraments.

This plainly was a work, not peculiar to the office, nor the age of the apostles: but indispensably necessary at all times to the well-being and efficiency of the Church, to the preservation and propagation of true religion. Not content, therefore, with promising to His chosen messengers the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and His own unfailing protection, He added the emphatic assurance of His own perpetual presence with them: "*Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*"¹ It is a blessed, though an awful thing to think, brethren, that we have inherited this promise; not only we His ministers, although it seems in an especial manner to pertain to us, but you also, who are our hearers; and it will be the fault of one or the other, or it may be of both of us, if we fail to experience its reality. We believe, and are sure, that the labours of the faithful minister of Christ, duly called and sent forth into His vineyard, are sanctioned by Divine authority, and blessed by the influences of the Holy Spirit, as being necessary for the edification of the Lord's people,

¹ St. Matthew xxviii. 20.

for their being rooted and grounded in the faith, and for their daily growth in grace.

It may indeed be said, in a certain sense, that a sufficient provision has been made for the salvation of man, in the written Word of God. This is literally true, because that Word makes known to him not only the truths of Revelation, but the nature and value, and proper use of the instrumental means, employed by the Holy Spirit to realize to each individual sinner the salvation wrought for all by Jesus Christ. The Holy Scriptures are "*able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*;"¹ but the Holy Scriptures teach us the necessity, in order thereto, of prayer and the Sacraments. The Holy Spirit has recorded therein the wonders of Divine power and love; and has traced, as with a sunbeam, the path of man's obedience. Everything that is requisite for a perfect understanding of the methods by which man may draw nigh to God, and be made His child by adoption and grace, and become an inheritor of His kingdom, is contained in the Holy Scriptures. They are "*sufficient for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*"² Yet surely it is obvious, that if no provision had been made for the application

¹ 2 Timothy iii. 15.

² Ibid. 16, 17.

of this remedy to the disease with which the whole world was infected, the gracious purposes of God in the Gospel Revelation would not have been completely answered. Had the Bible, with all its solemn warnings, and wonderful disclosures, and blessed promises, been launched forth into the wild chaos of the world's ignorance and corruption, and left to force its way, by the intrinsic energy of its own truth and holiness, to the conscience and affections of mankind, who can imagine that true religion would have made any considerable progress? To the question, "*How shall they believe in Him, of whom they have not heard?*"¹ it might be sufficient to reply, "*They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them:*"² they have the oracles of God in their hands, let them read them. But to the inquiry, "*And how shall they hear without a preacher?*" the experience of mankind furnishes a sufficient answer: They will not hear; they will not read; they will not understand and be saved. It is the Church of God which applies the Word of God to the souls of men by means of its ministry. That Word is indeed the sword of the Spirit, but it is to be wielded by an arm of flesh; and as to its external use (for we are not speaking here of that inward application of its virtue to the soul, which is the peculiar work of the Spirit), as to its

¹ Romans x. 14.

² St. Luke xvi. 29.

external use, its being wielded by an arm of flesh, the ministry of the Church is appointed for that special purpose. "*Preach the Word,—*
" do the work of an Evangelist,—study to show
" thyself approved unto God, a workman that
" needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the
*" Word of truth."*¹ "*The elders which are amongst*
*" you I exhort, feed the flock of God."*² Their precepts all imply an active ministration of the Word, an exposition of its doctrines, an enforcement of its commands, a commendation of its motives, an oral delivery of the message of reconciliation. Not only do the written records of the Gospel declare the infinite love of a pardoning God; but we, who are His ministers and remembrancers, are to put you in mind of that fact; we are ambassadors for Christ, to deliver His message of peace as it is written in the Gospel; "*We pray you, in Christ's stead, be*
*" ye reconciled unto God."*³ It is our office to bring sinners to Christ in His Church; to lead them to the green pastures and still waters which are there to be found, and to minister to them in due season that spiritual food, in the strength of which they may walk securely in the path of eternal life.

Surely then, if such are the purposes to be answered by the public ministrations of religion, and not to be effectually answered without them,

¹ 2 Tim. iv. 2, 5; ii. 15. ² 1 St. Peter v. 1, 2. ³ 2 Cor. v. 20.

we have abundant reason to expect a blessing upon their due and faithful performance ; and to feel a comfortable persuasion that where Christ's disciples are so assembled together for the express purpose of seeking Him and entering into closer communion with Him, Jesus Himself will be in the midst, and will say to them, in the silent influences of His grace, as well as in the declarations of His Word, "*Peace be unto you !*"

But it is of extreme importance, if we desire to avoid a superstitious notion of Christ's bodily presence, that we should endeavour to form to ourselves some more definite conception of the manner in which His gracious promise is fulfilled, as far as we are capable of forming any conception of that which is purely spiritual. What we believe to be the truth is this, that Jesus Christ is present in the religious assemblies of His servants, by being present in the minds and hearts of those who are assembled ; and that He realizes His promise to each individual worshipper, just in proportion as he is qualified and disposed, in the inner man, to admit that Divine presence : and therefore that the promise is fulfilled to the assembly of worshippers, by its fulfilment in the heart of each particular person. If then you desire to know where it is that Christ may be found in the midst of you, we answer, in His own words, "*The kingdom*

*“ of God cometh not with observation. Neither shall they say, Lo here ! or, Lo there ! for behold, the kingdom of God is within you.”*¹

Thus then it appears, that on the solemn occasions of public and common worship, although it may be said, in a general sense, that they are honoured with the more especial presence of the Divine Head of the Church, it is a real presence only to those who are qualified, by faith and love, to enjoy it ; an interior presence in their hearts and minds. So on the day of Pentecost, although the Holy Ghost came down amongst the apostles, as a rushing mighty wind, and filled all the house where they were sitting, it was the tongue of fire, sitting upon each of those holy men, which denoted his individual participation in the miraculous gift. When our blessed Lord consoled His apostles with the assurance, *“ If a man love Me, he will keep My words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him ;”*² we are to take the promise to ourselves, but not in a gross and carnal sense, as though we were to look for a bodily and personal presence of the Father or the Son ; such a presence as the Church of Rome supposes to be realized, with respect to Christ, in the Sacrament of His body and blood. We must not seek to *“ know Christ*

¹ St. Luke xvii. 20, 21.

² St. John xiv. 23.

“*after the flesh,*” but yet we are to expect a real and influential, though spiritual presence, and perceptible only in its effects. Indeed, we shall probably be right in concluding that it is in the more striking effects, resulting from the due performance of acts of worship by the assembled faithful, that the promise of Christ’s especial presence is fulfilled to them. That presence itself is certainly not confined to those occasions, but is the common privilege of all the saints at all times, in the world as well as in the sanctuary, in the privacy of the closet, as well as in the public solemnities of the Church. “*There is one God,*” says St. Paul, “*there is one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all,*”¹ not only ruling over and pervading all things, but dwelling in every one of His faithful servants. But the influence of that indwelling may surely be expected to be most powerful, and to produce the most noticeable results, when we are most directly and entirely engaged in the work of communing with God through Christ, and of glorifying Him as our Maker, Preserver, and Sanctifier; when we are listening to His own words; and especially when we are partaking spiritually of that body and blood of the Incarnate Son, which were in themselves the instruments, and in their consecrated

emblems are the pledges, of redemption and reconciliation.

Nor is it a sufficient objection to this opinion, which some perhaps may be inclined to treat as no better than the dream of enthusiasm, to say that it is not universally justified by experience; that persons may, and very often do, assemble themselves together for the purposes of religious worship and edification, without being sensible of any such consolation and encouragement as might be expected from the presence of their Divine Master, made known to them by the secret breathings of the Comforter. Many, perhaps, of those who now hear me, may feel this difficulty in their own case, and therefore be disposed to admit the force of this objection. But what wonder if it be so? Is it, my brethren, that when you meet together in these sacred courts, Jesus Christ is not amongst you indeed? or that you are not in a state which fits you to be sensible of His presence? What wonder, I ask, if it be so? Who, that looks round on our congregations, and marks the listlessness, the inattention, the indevotion which prevail there, can be in doubt as to the reason of it? Can they look to realize their Saviour's presence, and to feel the peace which He brings with Him, who pay Him less respect than they would pay to an earthly prince? who sit at their ease when they ought to take the lowest posture of

devout humility ; who gaze, or sleep, or are absent in spirit, while He is speaking to them in His Word, or by His ministers ? The fault is not in that Word, nor in the ministry of the Word, nor in the ordinances of the Church, but in themselves. "The wicked," says our Church, and such as be void of a lively faith, although they do carnally and visibly press with their teeth the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ ; yet in no wise are they partakers of Christ."¹ This is not less true of all the ordinances of common worship than it is of the sacraments.

It is only amongst the devout, the penitent, the pure in heart, that Jesus can be expected to come and to breathe the salutation of peace. The thoughtless, the cold-hearted, the carnal-minded, the profane, are perhaps never further from Him than when they are occupied in the forms of piety, and rest upon outward observances. And even they who have juster notions of the service which God requires, find it no easy task to bring themselves into that spiritual temper and frame of mind, which may qualify them for the full enjoyment and improvement of their religious opportunities. The Word of God deals with us in a way which is far from agreeable to the natural man. It speaks to us of those all-important facts, which we are con-

¹ Article XXIX.

tinually eluding or putting aside, death, judgment, eternity. It assures us of that which we are most reluctant to admit, that we are corrupt, sinful, ignorant, helpless creatures ; that by our own strength, and wisdom, and goodness, we can do nothing to make amends for the least of our offences against God's perfect law, nor to redeem ourselves from its consequences. It insists upon the indispensable necessity of a great spiritual change ; it commands us to come out from an ungodly world, and to free ourselves from a base thralldom to its customs, its opinions, and its pleasures, and to devote ourselves, the best energies of our souls and bodies, to the service of God in Christ. And besides this, it unfolds to us high and awful mysteries of the Divine nature and of our relation to God, which the carnal man is not able to comprehend, being amongst the things of God, which are spiritually discerned. The mind is not brought into that state of reverential humility which befits a learner in the school of Divine truth ; nor is it thoroughly imbued with a feeling of the infinite importance of the things there to be learned, to its own eternal welfare. Therefore it comes to pass, that with the pure and perfect Word of truth rightly divided and affectionately enforced by faithful ministers, and with free access to the fountains of grace unsealed in the Sacraments, those of the Church's children, who are in spirit the children

of this world, remain in a state of darkness and coldness ; adding to all their other offences that of not improving the opportunities of saving knowledge, nor profiting by the means of grace. They confine their religion to the stated performance of its offices on the Lord's day ; and then perhaps only once. It may be, that, in compliance with the Church's custom, they present themselves occasionally at the Lord's Table ; they cannot be charged with any act of gross immorality or dishonesty. But in the meantime the business or the pleasures of the world are pursued with an eager and continuous interest, uninterrupted by any serious thoughts of eternity ; while the work of God is but half performed, His Word is carelessly listened to, His worship is thought tedious, and the calls of charity are reluctantly and scantily answered. And the cause of this inconsistency is, that the Word never finds its way to their hearts ; the Holy Spirit has never wrought upon them His own peculiar work, because He has never been asked to do it. The truths of His written Word have never stirred the depths of their hearts, working in them a real sense of sin, or a fervent love of God.

We fear there are many, who forget that the outward teaching of the Holy Spirit is not sufficient for the ends of that office which He has undertaken in the Christian economy ;

but that there must be also an inward teaching of the heart, which must be powerfully turned to God, and disposed to inquire of Him; and that this too is the proper work of the Spirit. We obtain a literal and speculative acquaintance with the Word of God, by reading it, and by listening to those who are appointed to teach us; but before we can effectually profit by it, it must be mixed up with faith, and there must be what St. Paul terms "*a shedding abroad of the love of God in our hearts.*"¹

We appeal to the experience of those who have sought to obtain this influence in earnest prayer, and in the devout use of all the appointed means of grace, and by hearty endeavours to act up to their knowledge, whether they have not often found the times of devout assembly in the courts of the Lord's House to be seasons of special consolation and refreshment; whether the promise of the Saviour has not been realized to them at such moments; whether they have not found Him as a Teacher and a Comforter in the solemn offices of social worship, in the animating emulation of common prayer, in confession and thanksgiving, in the authoritative preaching of His Word, and in the spiritual communion of His body and blood. In this last respect, more especially, does the humble and penitent heart experience the truth of its

¹ Romans v. 5.

Saviour's promise. It is no vain assurance which the Church, or rather the Word of God, which is the Church's charter and text-book, gives us, "that if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy sacrament, then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us."¹

In the religious assemblies of the primitive Christians, where the Word of God was delivered by teachers, speaking under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost, there could be no question of the Divine presence, any more than there was when the glory of the Lord rested over the majestic shrine of the ancient temple. It was not only sensibly experienced by the faithful themselves, but was visible in its effects even to the unbeliever, who, at the sight of an assembly so engaged, would fall down on his face, and worship God, and report that God was in them of a truth. And, dear brethren, it is the same Word which is still spoken to the Church's children on her days of solemn meeting, and with the same delegated authority, and for the same purpose, although those who speak it are not under the same controlling and enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit, each in his own

¹ Exhortation in the Office for the Holy Communion.

person. There are many faithful and humble worshippers who still feel that Christ comes amongst them. Even in these later ages of the Church, He has at times manifested Himself, not in those tumultuous and disorderly outbreaks of enthusiasm against which the apostle emphatically cautions the Church, but in the decent and solemn forms of common worship; in the sober, but earnest and affectionate preaching of the Word; in the celebration of His own appointed memorial and instrument of spiritual union with Himself. By these means, we say, He has at times made Himself known even to scoffers and unbelievers, who have had the secrets of their hearts made manifest by the force of divine truth so embodied and realized, and have been brought to acknowledge the authority of the Gospel.

See, then, how beneficial to ourselves and others is this custom of assembling ourselves together in the house of prayer, and what reason we have to be thankful to our heavenly Father, for having so ordered the course of this world, that His Church can now serve Him in godly quietness. This duty was performed by the first-born children of the Church at the risk of persecution, imprisonment, torture, and even death. When their first meetings were held in that upper chamber, which was the first of all Christian churches, "*the doors*

*“ were shut for fear of the Jews : ”*¹ and when at a later period their heathen persecutors threatened them with the extremity of evil, if they persisted in the practice, they met together before break of day in caves, and secret places; and sent up orisons to God, more acceptable, it may be, than any which have since ascended to His mercy-seat from the splendid temples of a prosperous Church. Surely their example leaves us without excuse, if we are negligent and reluctant in our acts of public worship; unless indeed it can be said, that the nature of true piety is such, as to need the stimulus of danger to call it into vigorous action.

Bear in mind, then, my brethren, the special blessing which is to be looked for by those who join together in acts of common worship; even the more immediate presence of the Saviour. Come hither in the hope of meeting Jesus, and the peace which Jesus gives. Here does the Comforter wait for you, to lead you into the precincts of divine truth; to unfold to you mysteries which the angels have desired to look into; to help all your infirmities, to supply the defects of your knowledge in your approaches to the Source of light; and to make intercessions for you with groanings which cannot be uttered. Only bring into the sanctuary a heart filled

¹ St. John xx. 19.

with thoughts of that Divine Presence into which you enter, and of the peace which may there be found, even the peace that passeth all understanding, and your pious desires will not be disappointed. But be careful not so to misconceive the nature of your privileges, as to tie the fulfilment of Christ's promises to the mere outward instruments of their accomplishment, and to imagine that He is effectually present in the assemblies of His servants, when He is absent from their hearts. Beware of reposing in outward observances, and of thinking that any worship, however ceremonious and minute, can be acceptable to God, if it be not offered in spirit and in truth. Value very highly the opportunities of public worship and the means of grace; but remember that they are only means. Let this place of your solemn assembly be made a vestibule and entrance into the shrine of the invisible Church; and by a faithful and affectionate use of its privileges and opportunities, obtain for yourselves "*boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the vail, that is to say, His flesh.*"¹ Consecrate your hearts to God, as the temples in which He most delights to dwell, by His Spirit. It is from thence that the incense of prayer and praise must ascend, as

¹ Hebrews x. 19, 20.

a sweet-smelling savour, to be presented at the Throne by our great High Priest, and made acceptable by His intercession to the God and Father of us all. By acts of private and personal devotion, and by the daily sacrifice of the domestic altar, prepare yourselves for the more solemn and profitable celebration of the public acts of Christian worship, so that a faithful and affectionate pastor, and an inquiring and teachable people, may meet together in the presence of their common Lord, with the pleasing certainty of mutual benefit and encouragement; and under a solemn, yet cheering sense of their relation to, and communion with Him, in whose presence there is fulness of joy. You will, then, in that consciousness of His presence, which the Spirit of God, in answer to prayer, diffuses through the mind and heart of the pious worshipper, experience the reality of your Saviour's promise, that where two or three are gathered together in His Name, there will He be in the midst of them, and will hear in the depths of your spirit His gracious benediction, "*Peace be unto you.*"

SERMON XXI.

THE OBSERVANCE OF HOLY SEASONS.

ST. MATTHEW XXVI. 41.

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.

SUCH was the admonition, full of kindness and wisdom, which our blessed Lord addressed to the three disciples in Gethsemane, when He had awakened them from a slumber, which to an ordinary observer might have seemed to indicate a want of sympathy with their sorrowing Master, and an insensibility to their own impending loss. But, in truth, it was the very reverse of this. It was not carelessness nor apathy, but the fatigue of excessive sorrow which had weighed down their eyelids, and steeped their senses for a time in oblivion. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. Our blessed Saviour did not doubt the depth or strength of their love, for they were the most affectionate and zealous of all His followers; but He was grieved, perhaps,

at that indication of natural infirmity in those who had so lately pledged themselves to be faithful to Him, even unto death: "*Though we die with Thee, yet will we not deny Thee.*"

As the ardent and self-trusting Peter had been the foremost to proclaim his fixed determination, and as from him, therefore, might naturally be expected an eminent degree of watchfulness against the enemy, who desired to have him that he might sift him like wheat; so to him more especially was addressed the gentle but mournful remonstrance, "*Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst thou not watch one hour?*"¹ It was as if the Holy Jesus had said, "And is your love indeed no stronger than this? Whilst I, your Lord, and Master, and Friend, about to be betrayed into the hands of wicked men, and put to death for your sakes, was sorrowful, even unto death, at the near prospect of My own sufferings, and of the sins of mankind for which they were endured, could ye not for one short hour resist that natural weakness, of which Satan will seek to avail himself to your ruin? I see, by your humbled and sorrowful looks, that you lament the advantage which he has already taken over you. Awake, then, and quit yourselves like men. Remember your promise; but trust not again to your strength. Flee, as I have fled, to your Father which is in heaven, and implore

¹ St. Mark xiv. 37.

His support and protection against the trials which are even now coming upon you. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into any trial which may be too strong for your faith, and cause you to deny Me." Doubtless those devoted and single-hearted men felt all the gentleness, as well as the force (and the force all the more for the gentleness), of our Lord's rebuke : yet even when thus recalled to a sense of their duty and their danger, a second and a third time they were overpowered by the pressure of extreme anxiety and sorrow, and slumbered while their Master agonized and prayed.

The transactions of that memorable night, which ushered in the most dismal, yet in its results the most glorious day that ever shone upon the sons of men, have in all ages of the Church been regarded as the most appropriate subjects of devout meditation, at that season of the Christian year which immediately precedes the commemoration of our Saviour's death upon the cross. The week upon which we have now entered¹ was termed by the earlier Church the Great Week, the Holy Week, the Week of Fasts ; during which the Church's faithful children laid aside, as far as it could be done, all secular cares and occupations, and gave themselves up to exercises of penitence and prayer. The courts of justice were closed, and many debtors were set

¹ This Sermon was preached on Palm Sunday.

free, in honour of Him who was as at this time about to liberate mankind from the infinite debt owing to Eternal Justice for the sins of the whole world. It is still familiarly spoken of by an appellation, to every thoughtful mind of peculiar interest and solemnity, as Passion Week: the week in which the Incarnate Son of God suffered for the sins of men; the Just for the unjust; enduring not only the pain and shame of the cross, but the contradiction of sinners and the extremity of sorrow; the most excruciating pangs of bodily pain, and the sharpest anguish of a bruised and wounded spirit. It is so spoken of; but how is it observed? How many are there who realize to their own hearts all the solemn truths and facts which that term implies? How are the Church's wise and pious intentions carried out by those whose benefit they contemplate? Not, as in older times, by a marked abstinence from the lusts and vanities of the world; not by the daily concourse of worshippers to the appointed services of the sanctuary; not by a thoughtful and sorrowful listening to the recital of the sufferings of the Lamb of God; not by a devout contemplation of Him in His character of our Great High Priest, an infinitely worthy victim, the world's great Passover; not by a more retired and particular preparation of the soul for its high Easter festival, that it may cast out "*the leaven of malice and wicked-*

“*ness*,” and keep the feast “*with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth* ;” not, in short, as to the Christian world in general, by outward tokens of respect, nor by the holy affections which those tokens at once express and encourage, nor by any considerable interruption of the business, or the pleasures, which begin and terminate in the present life.

One day indeed, that day of grief and wonder, on which the Just suffered for the unjust, and made atonement for the sins of the world, is now again observed with decent solemnity ; but are there many who take part in the services of that day, with hearts prepared to contemplate a bleeding Saviour by previous recollection of thought, and such a course of special study, and meditation, and prayer, as may have calmed their spirits, and disengaged them from the entanglement of covetous, ambitious, sensual, or trifling thoughts ; and led them humble, and penitent, and submissive to the foot of the cross ? May we not say to those servants of Jesus Christ, who cannot resolve, in honour of their Divine Master, to abstain even for a little season from the customary pleasures of society, and to follow Him in spirit to Gethsemane, *What, can ye not watch with Him one hour ?* Can ye not, in thankful remembrance of His love, and under

the burthen of those sins which put Him to open shame, can ye not, in dutiful compliance with the Church's invitation, and for the good of your own souls, retire, if but partially, for a few days from the world, out of which He has called you; and follow Him step by step, along the path of tribulation which He trod for you? You, who are healed by His stripes, whose iniquities have bruised Him, whose sins planted upon His sacred Head the crown of thorns, embittered His cup of anguish, and bore down His spirit with a weight more intolerable than that of the cross under which He fainted: is it too much to ask of you in His Name, that you would forego some hours, or days, of pleasurable excitement for the sake of obtaining a nearer and more affecting view of these transactions, the like of which the world never saw; and in the truth and results of which you have so deep a personal interest? For upon them, as the last and surest evidences of the Divine condescension and mercy, rest all your hopes of escape from the wrath to come. Will you not devote some moments to special intercourse with Him who sacrificed Himself for you, and who requires from you the offering of yourselves, both souls and bodies, to His service?

If it be a truth "*worthy of all acceptance*
"*that Christ Jesus came into the world to save*

“*sinner*s,”¹ and if sinners were saved by His sufferings and death, then ought it to be unspeakably interesting to every one of those for whom He died, to notice and lay to heart all the circumstances of that death; the humiliation and suffering which preceded, as well as the wonders and glories which followed it. But this is not the only object which the Church has in view, in directing her children to keep the present season with more than ordinary solemnity, and in appointing a special service for every day of the week. It is not only for your own edification, as believers, but it is also for example’s sake: for the awakening of the careless, and for an argument to the doubtful, for the honour of the Saviour, and as a mark of your allegiance to His Church, that we urge upon you the duty of a daily attendance upon her services during the present week of preparation for the great Christian Passover. It is to be hoped, nay, it is to be presumed, for I am addressing an assembly of believers in God’s truth as revealed in His written Word, that you do not suffer a day to pass, in which some portion of that Word is not read, and meditated upon with prayer: and at this season of the Church’s year it can hardly be, but that the closing scenes of your Saviour’s ministry will form the subjects of

¹ 1 Timothy i. 15.

your study and reflection. And this, it may perhaps be thought, is enough. The devotions of the closet, you imagine, will answer all the ends of confirmation in the faith, and growth in love towards the Saviour. No, my brethren, it is not so, even with reference to those ends. It will not be denied, that if at the present season there were a general assembling together of the faithful in the sanctuary, an unanimous act of special homage to our Divine Redeemer, the effect upon the feelings of each individual worshipper would be different, in kind and degree, from that which follows upon any single act of solitary devotion. But this, as I observed, is not the only end to be answered by the Church's appointments. The Church requires, and most reasonably requires, a special demonstration of your faith in a crucified Saviour; a mark of your deliberate repentance for the sins which were amongst the ingredients of that cup of bitterness, which He desired, if it were possible, might pass from Him; an emphatic expression of your thankfulness for that wonderful consummation of the great mystery of godliness. The religious observance of Passion Week is an act of homage which the Church requires you to perform to her Divine Head; and, were it performed as it ought to be, it would be an awakening admonition to the profane and careless, and a practical

and palpable evidence to the unbeliever of the truth of the Gospel, and of the Church's authority and holiness. A suspension, not of the necessary business of the world, but at least of its pleasures and luxurious enjoyments, on the part of every member of the great Christian family, who has any such enjoyments to deny himself, and especially on the part of those whose stations are most eminent, their functions most important, and their example most influential ; together with a punctual and devout attendance upon those offices of piety, which commemorate the most interesting and important events in the world's history ; this would form a noble and affecting illustration of the depth and liveliness of our belief in the certainty of those events ; and in the truth and authority of that Religion of which they are the chief foundation stones.

This is what the Church intends, by enjoining upon her members the devout observance of Passion Week ; and it is much to be regretted, that any who profess to be of that number should think it a light matter to neglect her ordinances, and set at nought her godly discipline. The truth is, they do not make it a matter of conscience, or their consciences are ill-informed. For nearly a century after the Reformation the Church's order was generally observed, and we find, in the memoirs and letters of that period,

many pleasing evidences of the punctuality of that observance on the part of both Clergy and laity; and of the influence which it exercised upon every-day life, notwithstanding the profligacy of too many in the higher classes of society. Then followed the stern tyranny of Puritanism, succeeded, not unnaturally, by the reign of licentiousness and unbelief; and that by more than half a century of indifference and latitudinarianism, during which the privileges and obligations of church membership were well-nigh forgotten. In our own times, men's attention has been powerfully recalled to the subject; the tide of opinion has flowed, as is usual in such cases, too strongly in the opposite direction; and some devout and learned men, by asserting for the Church an authority which does not belong to her, have cast some suspicion upon that which does. Yet still it is true, with respect to the great body of those who have been made by baptism members of our Reformed Church, that a vague and indefinite acceptance of Christianity in general, is apt to hold the place of that well-considered and definite allegiance, which embraces the faith once delivered to the saints, according to the form of sound words, preserved as a precious inheritance from the apostles and apostolic men by the Church, claiming to be a witness and keeper of Holy Writ. Methods of edification are resorted to, if resorted to

at all, according to the taste or feelings of private individuals, and not in obedient conformity with those rules of holy discipline and order which are prescribed by the Church. And yet the Church, if it be entitled to the name, was invested with this authority by its Divine Head, and for this very end: to establish and carry on a spiritual government and discipline, as being that without which His religion could neither be effectually planted in the world, nor continue to be propagated and maintained. All things were to be done to edifying; therefore all things were to be done decently and in order. But decency and order can be secured only by the enactment of certain rules and forms. To leave these to the judgment or caprice of private men, would be to provide for and perpetuate confusion. “*But God is not the Author of confusion, but of peace, as in all Churches of the saints;*”¹ and therefore the authority to make these rules was vested, where alone it could be vested, in the Church. The members of that Church, being many, are one body, and members one of another, mutually related to and dependent upon one another, and subject to one Head. If they refuse or neglect to comply with the rules, which it has laid down for securing the great ends of its institution, they do what they can to hinder the attainment of those ends, and to defeat the purposes of its

¹ Corinthians xiv. 33.

Divine Founder. It is for those persons who secede from the Church's communion, seriously to consider, under what circumstances they can do so, without incurring the guilt of schism. But it is quite clear that they who continue in the Church's fellowship, are bound in conscience to fulfil all the obligations which that fellowship implies: nor will any considerate person, who knows the use of the Church, and its real authority, refuse his assent to the position laid down in the thirty-fourth of our Articles of Religion. "Whosoever through his private judgment, willingly and purposely doth openly break the traditions and ceremonies of the Church, which be not repugnant to the Word of God, and be ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, as he that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and hurteth the authority of the magistrate, and woundeth the consciences of the weak brethren." Never, surely, was there a time when it was more incumbent than it now is, upon all the members of our Church, to exhibit its efficiency as an ordained instrument of truth and godliness, by a strict and conscientious observance of all its holy rules, and a diligent use of all its means of edification and growth in grace. If all those rules were indeed complied with, its whole system of discipline submitted to, and its whole provision of ordi-

nances resorted to by the entire body of its members, how glorious and blessed would be the results! how great would be the increase of peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety, in this nation! how would God be glorified in His Church, dwelling therein in the visible beauty of holiness! What a standard would be lifted up against iniquity! how would sinners abashed, and cavillers put to silence, and unbelievers converted, make manifest the secrets of their hearts, and report that God is in us of a truth!

Whatever may be the folly and extravagance of here and there an individual minister, you cannot complain that the Church to which you belong encumbers her public worship with a multitude of trifling forms or superstitious ceremonies, overlaying the spirit of devotion with outward observances. There is nothing surely in the services of our Church, as prescribed by her rubric, inconsistent with the spiritual nature of that religion which it is her office to keep alive in the world. Certainly there is nothing in the offices provided for this solemn season but what is scriptural, edifying, affecting; nor will any one deny, that, if he could but engage his heart in the performance of those offices, and use them all as they are intended to be used, he would be a wiser, and holier, and happier man. On the other hand, the too prevalent disuse and

neglect of these ordinances afford to the Romanist an obvious and plausible objection to our Reformed Church, as wanting due authority and the principle of unity, and the spirit of obedience to apostolical institutions. And on this ground, as well as for the ends of personal improvement and general edification, we would urge upon our hearers the duty of returning to that devout and profitable compliance with the Church's order which marked its earlier days.

But let it never be forgotten, that all the outward forms and expressions of devotion, useful though they be, and in many cases indispensable, are yet only expressions; the scaffolding, not the building; means to be employed for the attainment of an end. That end is the fixing of our thoughts upon the Author and Finisher of our faith, the engaging of our reason and affections to the contemplation of a suffering and dying Saviour, offering Himself a sacrifice for our sins. No person who believes in the atoning virtue of that sacrifice will deny that it is the Church's duty to commemorate it with feelings of the most profound devotion and thankfulness, and with every suitable demonstration of those feelings. And I would ask, Who will be best qualified to commemorate it; he who comes at once and without preparation from the cares of business, or the pleasures of society, or he who has

employed a part of each preceding day of Passion Week in attending the solemn services of the Church ?

Whatever answers the purpose of withdrawing you, even for a short space of time, from the dissipation of your every-day life, and gives you leisure to collect—alas, how difficult a task—your scattered thoughts, and to fix them upon the great question of your relation to God in Christ, is so far useful ; and it is folly and waste of a precious talent not to make for yourselves many such opportunities ; still more, not to improve them when they are proposed to you with the most solemn and earnest invitations and entreaties for your acceptance. Nor is it pleasure alone, nor amusement, nor vanity, which I intend by the term dissipation. Everything may be so called, with reference to our religious state and character, which scatters and drives away serious thoughts and purposes ; and impairs the single-mindedness and earnestness of our progress in the path of Christian duty. Not only the luxury, the sensuality, the frivolity, which are too often to be seen in the higher classes, or the grosser pleasures and more debasing recreations of the poor ; but the intellectual pursuits of those who are devoted to literature, or science, or the arts ; the speculations of commerce, the engagements of professional life, the turmoil of political warfare ; all these are apt to distract the

spirit of man within him, disengage it from the influence of religion, and weaken its heavenward tendencies. And whatever withdraws it for a season from such entanglements, and leaves it at leisure to converse with reason and conscience, or leads it into the precincts of God's tabernacle, where the light of His Word shines, and the grace of His Spirit is shed abroad, must tend to strengthen and invigorate the life of God in the soul. But the special benefit to be sought for in a devout observance of the Holy Week, is the enlivening and confirming of our faith in the atoning efficacy of the death of Christ, and the strengthening of all those sacred sympathies which draw us nearer to the Saviour by the cords of love, and further from that evil world, our nonconformity with which is a necessary evidence of our being His. "*I have manifested Thy name,*" said our blessed Lord in prayer to His Father, "*unto the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*"¹

Set before you, dear brethren, as the leading subject of your meditations at the present season, the central point to which your thoughts and prayers may be directed, the Lamb of God slain for the sins of the world, your own among the

¹ St. John xvii. 6, 9, 14.

rest; “*God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.*”¹ But let your meditation be of a practical kind, looking not only to the ultimate object of that mysterious consummation of His counsels of mercy, your salvation from eternal death, but to its force and obligation, as an example to all His followers of humility, and patience, and perfect resignation to the Will of God. The death of Christ was our ransom, His submission thereto our pattern. “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*” The doctrine of the Atonement is the keystone of the Gospel, the centre of all its sublime truths, the spring of its overflowing consolations, the pledge of its blessed promises, the true motive to holiness and charity; the sure and steadfast anchor of the soul. But then, in order that it may be experienced by each individual to be all this, it must be thoroughly believed, and cordially embraced with the heart’s deepest and warmest affection. “*We love Him, because He first loved us.*”² But no man can come unto Him except he be drawn of God. No man can say, from the deep conviction of his soul, that Jesus is the Christ, but by the Spirit. Surely then that divine attraction, that inspiration of a right belief, are to be sought for by all proper methods at all suitable opportunities,

¹ 2 Cor. v. 19.² 1 St. John iv. 19.

and especially by those which assist and carry forth the inward yearnings and efforts of an awakened soul; by all the influence of example, and mutual edification, and reverent solemnity, and the remembrance of that gracious promise, which, if it were borne in mind, would indeed sanctify our solemn assemblies, and bring down a blessing upon them, and give full effect to the ministry of the Word, "*Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them.*"¹ Yes, my brethren, the Saviour is even here; and He *will* be here, with as many as shall meet from day to day, to worship in spirit and in truth; to contemplate the last awful, touching scenes of His ministry of love, His agony, His betrayal, His Passion, His precious death. Let us imagine that we hear the Saviour's voice still speaking in His Church, as it was once heard in the stillness of Gethsemane: "*My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me.*"²

Even so, brethren, let us be found here, watching with the Saviour; watching with Him, and watching for Him. Let us be here also, watching for ourselves, awake to all our spiritual dangers, and all our Christian duties; and "*looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing*

¹ St. Matthew xviii. 20.

² Ibid. xxvi. 38.

*“of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”*¹

*“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.” “Watch and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”*² *“But who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth?”*³ Not the careless, slumbering, inconsistent wearer of the Name of Christ; not the scorner of God’s truth and of His counsels of mercy; not the contemner of His ordinances, the infrequent worshipper; but the anxious, watchful, affectionate servant of his Lord; he who has diligently sought to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, to be spiritually united to his Saviour, and to set forward His glory, and the growth of His Church, and the salvation of the brethren, by an exemplary use of all the means of grace, and a careful improvement of his privileges as a member of Christ’s mystical body; by the thoughtful study of God’s Word; in the approaches of prayer through the great Intercessor, by the Spirit; and in the frequent communion of Christ’s body and blood.

He who shall have done all this, and yet more than this, will still be an unprofitable servant; but he will have done it under an abiding sense

¹ Titus ii. 13.

² St. Luke xxi. 36.

³ Malachi iii. 2.

of his relation to God as a reconciled son, the love of Christ constraining him, and in the strength of His grace ; and therefore, when the Lord “ *shall appear,*” he shall “ *have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.*”¹

¹ 1 St. John ii. 28.

SERMON XXII.

THE BONDAGE OF ROME FATAL TO CHRISTIAN
LIBERTY.

GALATIANS V. 1.

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free ; and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

THE liberty wherewith Christ has made us free is of a twofold kind : an emancipation from the bondage of a strict ceremonial law ; and a freedom from the still more galling and odious slavery of sin. It is to the former kind of liberty that the words of my text are primarily to be referred ; but in principle they are undoubtedly not less applicable to the latter. No inconsiderable number of teachers in the apostolic churches were inclined to regard the Gospel, not as having fulfilled the promises and substantiated the shadows of the Law, and superseded its ritual prescriptions, but only as a more perfect form of the older dispensation,

a new plant grafted upon the ancient stock, not abrogating the sacramental observances of the older covenant, but giving them new virtue and efficacy, for the remission of sins. They insisted upon the necessity of circumcision, and strove to perpetuate the legal bondage which neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear. It was by his strenuous opposition to a doctrine so derogatory to the free grace of the Gospel, that St. Paul incurred the resentment and opposition of his countrymen, who would only consent to enter into the new covenant through the obsolete portal of their ancient religion; through the narrow gate of the Temple into the open sanctuary of that Church, of which, though founded no less upon prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ Himself was the head corner stone. "*Behold, I say unto you,*" writes the apostle, "*that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law : ye are fallen from grace.*"¹ Such persons "*being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, did not submit themselves unto the righteousness of God ;*" "*even the righteousness of God*

¹ Galatians v. 2—4.

*“which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.”*¹

We are not to be surprised, if many of those upon whom a conviction of the truth of the Gospel was forced by the indisputable testimony of prophecy and miracle, did not fully appreciate it as a *“perfect law of liberty.”*² It seemed to deprive them of the props of meritorious observances upon which they had been accustomed to lean, those supports of which they were able, as it were, to see and feel the reality; substituting in their place a sentiment or disposition of the spiritual part of their nature, for the full perception of which a state of the affections was required, which they had not been accustomed to cultivate, and upon which they set but little store. A sense of sin, self-disesteem, humility of spirit, were rarely to be found in those, who held that the proper scope and end of their law was nothing else than to afford them several ways and means of merit. It was cutting away from under them the ground upon which they stood, to teach them that the law was the ministry of death, and in itself an outward and lifeless thing, neither procuring nor engendering the Divine life within, nor effecting that internal transformation and recovery of the Divine image, which God requires in all the heirs of glory. The apostle, there-

¹ Romans x. 3, and iii. 22.

² St. James i. 25.

fore, applies himself with great earnestness to undermine these treacherous foundations, and to throw down the fabric of false security which his brethren after the flesh had erected thereon ; to beat down their presumptuous conceit of merit, and to set forth the free grace and mercy of God in Christ as the only source of all righteousness and happiness. To glorify and magnify that free mercy and grace in its new and final manifestation, was the design and scope of the Gospel dispensation ; it being impossible for sinful men, by any works which they can perform, to satisfy God's justice for their transgressions of His holy law ; or truly to comply with that law, without His Divine assistance. It should seem, at first sight, that mankind would eagerly embrace the offer of that free mercy, and joyfully accept a deliverance from the bondage of an impracticable obedience. But as wicked men "*love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil ;*" so self-trusting men prefer the slavery of outward observances to the spiritual liberty of faith in the goodness of God, because its very exactions seem to present so many points of self-dependence, whereon to rest a plea of acceptance and a claim of reward. But all such self-dependence, upon whatever degree of outward strictness it might be based, was essentially servile, and incapable of setting free the moral agent from

the penalty or the power of sin : and most seasonable was, and ever will be, the apostle's caution, "*Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free.*"

But are we then to understand this notion of Christian liberty as involving an exemption from the necessity of observing any rules and ordinances in religion ? Assuredly not ; for our blessed Saviour Himself has expressly appointed two such ordinances to be observed by all His followers : Baptism and the Supper of the Lord ; and He invested His apostles with full authority to lay down such rules as might be necessary for the order and good government and extension of His Church, and to transmit such authority, limited by certain fixed principles, to the Church itself ; those principles being very simple and intelligible ; "*Let all things be done unto edifying,*" and "*Let all things be done decently and in order.*"¹ And if it be asked, But how are these rules themselves to be limited ? we answer, By soberness and charity. Things in themselves lawful become inexpedient when they offend, rather than edify ; and in such cases for the sake of charity we may be required to abridge ourselves of our lawful liberty. But this does not warrant such a capricious use of liberty in each individual Christian, as would convert it into a lawless licentiousness.

¹ 1 Corinthians xiv. 26, 40.

Individual liberty, in the externals of religion, as in matters of civil polity, may be restricted by certain fixed laws, for the sake of the general good. It is God's good pleasure always to have a Church upon earth, even unto the end of the world; and the Church, as a society, or spiritual commonwealth, founded by Him for certain definite purposes, must be under some government; and a government must have authority to make laws in matters immediately concerning the methods by which the ends of the Church's being are to be attained; and all the members of that body are bound to conform to those laws, in so far as they are not repugnant to the written Word or known Will of the Supreme Lawgiver. "Although," said the framers of our Liturgy, "the keeping or omitting of a ceremony in itself considered, is but a small thing; yet the wilful and contemptuous transgression and breaking of a common order and discipline is no small offence before God. *Let all things be done among you, saith St. Paul, in a seemly and due order*: the appointment of the which order pertaineth not to private men; therefore no man ought to take in hand nor presume to appoint, or alter, any public or common order in Christ's Church, except he be lawfully called and authorized thereunto."¹ It is

¹ Preface to the Book of Common Prayer, "Of Ceremonies."

therefore no infringement of the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, to be required to observe the rules which are prescribed by the Church for the public worship and service of God; provided always that they be prescribed as being profitable for decency and edification, and not, with the exception of the sacraments, as being necessary to salvation; nor as having in themselves an intrinsic atoning or sanctifying efficacy.

And here it is, that the Church of Rome does indeed invade and violate Christian liberty; enacting a multitude of ceremonies as necessary parts of the worship of God, the omission of any one of which vitiates and nullifies the whole religious act to which it belongs; thus implicating outward observances with acts of faith, and "*teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" And this infringement of Christian liberty extends far beyond the mere imposition of ceremonies as necessary to the completeness and acceptableness of religious worship. A far more galling chain is imposed upon the consciences of all men who are suffered to remain in the communion of that Church, in that mass of human traditions which it places on a level with the Word of God, as a coordinate rule; or rather which it makes to be the unwritten Word of God, and the belief of which it requires as necessary to eternal

salvation. The supremacy of the Bishop of Rome, the worshipping of images, the invocation of saints and angels, the adoration of the blessed Virgin, the propitiatory sacrifice of the mass, transubstantiation, communion under one kind, the compulsory celibacy of the clergy, prayer in an unknown tongue; these, and many other points of belief and practice, which by the confession of divers of their own writers are to be proved rather by unwritten traditions, than by the plain letter of God's written Word, are so many links of that complex and artificial chain, by which the Church of Rome holds in bondage the reason and conscience of her children. So reluctant is she to loosen her hold, or to impair the charm of infallibility by which the whole is cemented together, that when her defenders, long ago defeated upon Scripture grounds, are also driven from tradition itself, by the plain and undeniable evidence of primitive antiquity against them, and their great Diana¹ is unable to protect them; they are permitted, though they cannot be expressly authorised, to undermine the very foundations of the Christian faith itself, by a theory of development. This

¹ "True it is that for most of these they pretend to Scripture also; but with so little colour at the best, and with so little confidence at the last, that when they are hard put to it, they are forced to fly from that hold, and to shelter themselves under *their great Diana — tradition.*" — BISHOP SANDERSON in his *sixth Sermon ad Clerum.*

theory reduces the Christian Scriptures, from the eminence on which they have hitherto been placed by the common opinion of believers, as a final and conclusive revelation of the Divine Will and Counsels, to the level of a vague, obscure, imperfect announcement, or suggestion of God's truth, a seminal principle, deposited, as it were, in the soil of human understanding, to be developed from time to time by the Church, as the exigencies of the case might require, and as men's minds might be prepared to receive it; it being assumed, for upon this theory it clearly cannot be proved, that the Church invested with that most important trust is the Church of Rome. It is manifest that this supposition involves in itself the radical principle of infidelity. It is a theory to which, in my judgment, the simplest answer is the best; and that answer will surely be supplied by the common sense and honesty of every tolerably well-informed mind. The mind which does not at once revolt from the doctrine, as inconsistent with the essential characteristics of the Gospel revelation, and of those records of the Divine decrees and purposes, which are "*profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,*" is very likely to be entangled in the web of sophistry, which has been woven by the advocates of this theory; a theory which, we doubt not, will before long be proved to be far more perilous to the system

which it is contrived to uphold, than to the truth which it labours to obscure.

Wherein then consists the danger against which we think it necessary to warn you? Why should it be needful for us to repeat to the members of a Church, which, by the good providence of God, has been emancipated from so galling a yoke, the admonition of St. Paul to the Galatians: “*Stand fast in the liberty where-
“ with Christ hath made us free; and be not
“ entangled again with the yoke of bondage*”? To explain with accuracy and fulness the nature of that danger, would require a lengthened disquisition on the constitution and history of the human mind, far exceeding the limits prescribed to the preacher. But it may be briefly pointed out. The bondage from which Christians have been set free is twofold, that of the understanding and that of the will. It is with the former, as bearing upon the latter, that my present argument is concerned. The true liberty of a rational and moral agent consists in a clear unbiassed judgment, and in a power of acting conformably thereto. Man is free, when his reason is not overawed by groundless and unworthy fears, nor bribed by foolish and fantastic hopes; when it is not mastered and hurried away by lusts and passions, nor deluded by false appearances of present good; but considers impartially, judges wisely, and follows out that

judgment in its practical results. This is briefly summed up in that remarkable promise of our blessed Lord to His apostles, and through them to all His followers: "*Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*"¹ It is obvious, that a freedom of judging, in questions concerning religious and moral duties, must directly and materially affect the freedom of choice and action; and that to impose any other restrictions upon reason, than those by which God Himself has been pleased to limit and circumscribe its exercise, is to impair and cripple man's capacity of knowing and serving Him. But such is the weakness of our fallen state, that man too readily resigns his freedom, or rather, is content to remain without it, (for by nature he has it not,) and is glad to be excused from the trouble of working out for himself that freedom, by an honest and painful inquiry after truth, and by a fixed resolution to pursue it into all its practical consequences. This infirmity of our nature first manifested itself in the desire which impelled our first parents to grasp at the knowledge of good and evil by eating of the forbidden fruit, rather than wait for its development by methods and at a time of God's own appointment; and it is this, in a variety of manifestations, which causes men to set up idols in their understandings and affections, and to

¹ St. John viii. 32.

trust to other methods of knowing God's truth, and of doing Him service, than those which He Himself has been pleased to prescribe.

The mind which has not been made free by a knowledge of that truth, to be acquired only by an honest self-discipline and careful inquiry after the plainly revealed Will of God, readily mistakes superstition for religion; and places, if not its essence, yet its substantive and indispensable part, in a multitude of outward observances, self-inflicted austerities, and an abstinence from the creatures and ordinances of God, practised under a persuasion of their operative holiness, as being in themselves meritorious and satisfactory for sin. Such acts may in various instances, and in different degrees, be highly useful as auxiliary to the process of inward renovation; but it is an intolerable tyranny to impose them upon the consciences of men as indispensable parts of religion, forbidding that which God has nowhere forbidden; and it is a base and dangerous servitude to be under the thrall of such an usurped power, and to trust for acceptance with God upon that which has no particle of propitiatory or atoning virtue. "Whosoever," says that great divine, Bishop Sanderson, "hates not this usurpation of the high priest of Rome with a perfect hatred, is justly unworthy of, and shamefully unthankful for, that liberty and freedom which

the blessed Son of God has purchased for His Church.”¹

Then as for the slavery of opinion, the danger of our being entangled therein and overcome, arises from the natural proneness of man's mind, in matters of high concernment and controverted certainty, to take up the conclusions of others, who are supposed to have had greater advantages for the discovery of truth, and who are sufficiently positive in asserting that they have found it. There is no attribute which men would more recognise in a teacher than that of infallibility; and in proportion to the importance of the truths sought for, and the supposed difficulty of ascertaining them, will be the readiness of ordinary minds to acknowledge the existence of that attribute in one, who, possessing to a certain extent undoubted authority, claims, in addition thereto, the prerogative which the Supreme Author and Fountain of truth has not seen fit to delegate to any mortal being, of finally and peremptorily deciding all controversy. Unstable and ill-informed minds are most easily captivated by the promise of a conclusive settlement of their doubts. They are too eager to obtain the ease which that promise holds out to them, to scrutinize very narrowly the authority which pretends to give it. This is the leading feature of that strong delusion which takes them captive

¹ Sixth Sermon ad Clerum.

and consigns them to hopeless thralldom, the master-spell, which crowns and gives potency to the deceivableness of unrighteousness. To be assured by an infallible judge that they are in possession of the truth; that, if they believe whatever he commands them to believe, and practise all that he enjoins upon them, they shall be saved; and that, by methods of his appointment, they may by themselves, or through the vicarious agency of other men, purchaseable at a fixed price, expiate and make satisfaction for their sins, or at least avert a part of the punishment due to them, is too comfortable a persuasion not to be eagerly embraced by many, who cannot easily substantiate to their own minds all that is included in those two grand, simple, fundamental truths of the Gospel: "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved*;"¹ and, "*Without holiness no man shall see the Lord*."² And nothing is more common than for persons, imperfectly instructed in the grounds of their faith, who have quitted the communion of our Church and gone over to that of Rome, in consequence of doubts suggested by subtle disputants, to assign as the sole reason of their sad change, the comfort which they find in the shelter of an infallible authority, which solves all their doubts and spares them all inquiry. They tell you that inward con-

¹ Acts xvi. 31.² Hebrews xii. 14.

viction is far better than demonstration; that they have found a harbour of refuge; that they feel themselves to be safe. But it is marvellous that any one, who has even a tolerable acquaintance with the Volume of Inspiration and the records of history, should ever be persuaded to venture his salvation upon so frail a bark as that of papal infallibility; that infallibility which at different times has stamped with its impress the most opposite and irreconcilable dogmas and practices; which, in the person of one Gregory, solemnly renounced a supremacy over his brethren, while in another it anathematized all who questioned it; which led one pope to suppress powerful religious orders as the worst enemies of the Church, and another to revive them as its best friends; which for many years was claimed by two rival pontiffs, who divided Christendom, and mutually consigned one another and their adherents to perdition; and respecting which the most learned doctors of that Church have never yet been able to determine where it resides.

Nearly allied to a belief in this presumptuous dogma, is a vain imagination, that certain persons, distinguished for a more than ordinary degree of holiness, or, at least, of asceticism, will not be permitted to fall into dangerous errors; but will be guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth. This is, in truth, a belief in individual infalli-

bility: and it is that which gives to all schismatics the power of forming sects. "The "Church," says Lord Bacon, and it is one of those words of the wise, which are true for all ages, "*as nails fastened by the masters of "assemblies,*" "the Church never wanteth a kind of persons who love the salutation of Rabbi, Master; not in ceremony or compliment, but in an inward authority which they seek over men's minds, in drawing them to depend upon their opinions, and to seek knowledge at their lips. Such spirits do light upon another sort of natures, which do adhere to these men, stiff followers, and such as zeal marvellously for those whom they have chosen for their masters. This latter sort, for the most part, are men of young years and superficial understanding, carried away with partial respects of persons, or with the enticing appearances of godly names and pretences. Few follow the things themselves; more, the names of the things, and most, the names of their masters. The universities are the seat or continent of this disease, whence it has been, and is derived into the rest of the realm."¹

Such are some of the chief features of that weakness of the human mind, which predisposes it to "*believe a lie,*" and to yield itself a willing

¹ "Advertisement touching the Controversies of the Church of England."

captive to "*the mystery of iniquity*;" and the present is, alas! too plainly a time at which it is most needful for those, who stand on the watch-towers of the Church and observe the approaches of the adversary, to cry aloud to every soul that is given to them in charge, "*Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free; and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.*" The saying of St. Peter surely holds good of the corruptions of error, no less than of the lusts of the flesh: "*If after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning; for it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.*"¹

To those members of our own communion whose courage is shaken by that which is going on around them; who begin to doubt whether more may not be said for the system which was cast off at the Reformation, than they have been accustomed to suppose, we offer this advice. Forbear from controversial reading, and still more from controversial talking. Be not affrighted with the reproach of schism; but

¹ 2 St. Peter ii. 20, 21.

remember that the true schismatic is not he who for good cause separates, but he who makes separation necessary. Compare the Articles and Formularies of our Church with the plain words of Holy Scripture, and the Creeds and Liturgies of the early Church; and be earnest in prayer for the secret teaching of the Spirit of truth, to guide you to a right judgment in all things, "*that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.*"¹ If you have not hitherto found in the Church's teaching and ordinances all the comfort and tranquillity of mind which you think might be experienced under a more minute and rigorous system of spiritual discipline, consider whether that has been the Church's fault or your own; whether you have listened to her teaching with that meekness, and docility, and sincere love of truth, which constitute the honest and good heart of which our Saviour speaks, as necessary to a profitable hearing of the Word; whether you have used her holy ordinances in exact compliance with her rules, and with an earnest desire to experience their efficacy. If not, it is manifestly your duty, as honest and reasonable men, not to pass over to the communion of another Church, but to think and act out, in all its fulness, the mind of your own. In

¹ Philippians i. 10.

so doing, you will not only stablish, strengthen, and settle your own faith, but will confirm that of others; who, when they see the efficacy of those means of grace which are sufficient, in your case, for the ends of holiness, and charity, and peace of mind, will acknowledge you as members of the true mystical body of Christ, and “*report that God is in you of a truth.*” Remember that the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, does not exempt us from a single moral obligation, nor from a dutiful compliance with the rules and order of a Scriptural Church. Rather does it strengthen the bands of a holy obedience, just as a deliverance from the tyranny of a despot binds us all the more straitly to a conscientious observance of the just and wholesome laws of a free constitution.

“*Beware,*” then, “*lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. . . . Let no man beguile you of your reward, in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.*”¹

¹ Colossians ii. 8, 18, 19.

Let us now, in behalf of ourselves, and of those who have erred and are deceived, and whom we desire to bring back into the way of truth, unite in prayer to Almighty God, who has built His Church upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the head corner stone, that He will “grant us so to be joined together in unity of spirit by their doctrine, that we may be made a holy temple acceptable unto Him, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”

SERMON XXIII.

CHURCH EXTENSION—HOME MISSIONS.¹

MATTHEW IX. 37, 38.

*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.
Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will
send forth labourers into His harvest.*

SUCH was the expressive and affectionate exclamation of Him who came to seek and to save that which was lost, when He saw the multitudes, and “*was moved with compassion, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.*” They were wearied and lay down, having followed Jesus from place to place, anxious to witness His wonderful works, and to listen to His still more wonderful teaching, but unable for the most part to satisfy their curiosity; for of the great numbers who crowded around Him, a few only in comparison could at any one time come near to Him or hear Him. The kind and merciful Jesus, who knew their real wants better than

¹ See Note at the end of the Volume.

they did themselves, and who was desirous above all things of accomplishing the work which His Father had given Him to do, was moved with pity ; and pointed them out to His disciples, as a harvest of souls, ready to be gathered in ; but requiring a greater supply of labourers than had yet been commissioned for the work. In the multitudes who lay fainting on the plains of Galilee, our blessed Lord beheld a type and example of the whole race of mankind. By their fatigue and disappointment He was perhaps reminded of the bondage and wearisomeness of sin, and the spiritual destitution under which the whole creation groaned and travailed in pain together until that moment. And as he looked abroad, with the glance of omniscience, upon that vast and almost interminable field of labour, while to assist Him in the commencement of His vast enterprise, He saw beside Him only twelve unlearned, simple men of Galilee ; well might He exclaim, in a sense not then understood by His hearers, “ *The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.*” And well might He add, looking to the nature and objects of that office with which His apostles were to be invested, and to the source from which their sufficiency was to be derived, “ *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest.*”

These figurative expressions of our Saviour present three points for our consideration;—the plenteousness of the Lord's spiritual harvest; the fewness of the labourers therein; and the duty of prayer to the Lord of the harvest that He will send forth more labourers. From which follows, by natural and unavoidable inference, the obligation incumbent upon all His servants to set forward the same great work.

Our Saviour, in that awful parable of the wheat and the tares, calls the judgment-day the harvest, when the saints shall be gathered into the garners of the Lord, and the wicked shall be burnt with fire unquenchable. But the harvest spoken of in the text means the gathering in of the redeemed out of a wicked world; not only of those who were to be "*the first-fruits unto God and the Lamb*,"¹ but of all, who should thenceforth call upon the name of Jesus, and be set free from the curse of spiritual barrenness by the sanctifying and fertilizing energies of the Holy Spirit. On more than one occasion our Lord spoke of the preaching of His Word as the sowing of the good seed; and of the conversion of mankind to His religion as the harvest: "*Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he*

¹ Revelation xiv. 4.

*“that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together.”*¹ But the plenteousness, of which our Saviour speaks, refers not so much to the number of those who should finally be *“counted worthy of the kingdom of God,”*² and be the faithful labourer’s *“crown of rejoicing in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming,”*³ as to the vast and almost boundless field of ministerial labour which the Gospel dispensation was then opening to view. The whole human race was dead in trespasses and sins; the whole world was in ignorance, and at enmity with God, the whole world was to be enlightened, and reconciled to God. The Gospel was to be a light to lighten every man that should come into the world; and Jesus Christ was about to die, not only for the sins of His immediate followers, nor of the first believers, but *“for the sins of the whole world.”*⁴ Such was the comprehensiveness of God’s purposes of mercy to a sinful race. That they are not equally comprehensive in their final issues; that the corruption of a fallen nature, and the malignity of a spiritual adversary, are suffered to interfere, and to limit the effects of a design which was of universal intendment; that any should perish, when God desires that all may be saved, is a great mystery, but a certain truth.

¹ St. John iv. 35, 36.

³ 1 Thessalonians ii. 19.

² 2 Thessalonians i. 5.

⁴ 1 St. John ii. 2.

That it is a truth, we are assured by God Himself in His written Word. That it is a mystery, we need not wonder; for *“the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.”*¹ Of His attributes we perceive only the faint emanations and shadows, of some perhaps we may be wholly ignorant. To reconcile the certainty of God’s foreknowledge with the practical assurance of man’s free-will, is a task to which our faculties are incompetent. Nevertheless, they are to be reconciled. *“God is not willing that any should perish.”*² *“It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.”*³ *“The everlasting Gospel”* is to be preached *“to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.”*⁴ All nations are to be baptized and taught.⁵ And yet, though *“many are called, few are chosen;”*⁶ and *“though many there be that seek to enter in”* at the strait gate, *“few there be that find it.”*⁷

It appears then, that however our natural reason may be perplexed with this apparent inconsistency between the purposes of God, and His execution of them; although the number of those who have savingly embraced the Gospel of His blessed Son, be very inconsiderable,

¹ 1 Corinthians ii. 11.⁴ Revelation xiv. 6.² 2 St. Peter iii. 9.⁵ St. Matthew xxviii. 20.³ St. Matthew xviii. 14.⁶ St. Matthew xxii. 14.⁷ St. Luke xiii. 24, and St. Matthew vii. 14.

when compared with the multitudes who have died in ignorance or impenitence; yet the message itself of peace was of universal intendment; and if it meet not with that universal acceptance, of which it is worthy; or if, when accepted, it fail of universally producing the effects which it is designed to produce, the reason is, not that God will not save many; but that many will not be saved. “*With Him is plenteous redemption; and He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities;*”¹ this is His gracious intention; but in its fulfilment He finds reason to expostulate with those who are sinners against their own souls, and to say to them, by His prophet; “*Israel doth not know; My people doth not consider;*”² and by His Son, “*Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life.*”³

But provision was made, by the death of Jesus Christ, and in His Gospel and His Church, for the recovery of all mankind. The field into which He sent His labourers was the whole world: “*Go teach all nations;*” and they were to prosecute the work till the consummation of all things; “*Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*”⁴ And what was the sickle which they were to put into that harvest, the implement by which souls were to be

¹ Psalm cxxx. 7, 8.

³ St. John v. 40.

² Isaiah i. 3.

⁴ St. Matthew xxviii. 19, 20.

gathered out of that field, and saved from the burning, and made precious in the sight of God? The doctrine of the Cross; the preaching of "*Christ crucified; unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.*"¹ The vain philosophy and the debasing superstition of the heathen world; the obstinate pride and perverse incredulity of the Jewish people, were to be beaten down and cleared away, that "*the Word of the Lord might have free course and be glorified.*"² The prince of the power of this world was to be attacked in his strongholds; entrenched as he was in the evil passions and dearly cherished opinions of mankind; and enthroned in the splendour of that earthly sovereignty, with which he had hoped to tempt the Redeemer to a forgetfulness of His holy and merciful purposes. So varied, so arduous was the work to be done by the labourers in the Lord's harvest; and while millions were fainting under the deadly disease of sin, and the decree had gone forth for the healing of the nations, a few unlettered, timid Galileans only were commissioned to take in hand the mighty enterprise; and even to them, the Spirit of Truth had not then imparted a just conception of the nature of their office, much less

¹ 1 Cor. i. 23, 24.² 2 Thessalonians iii. 1.

the power of executing its duties. The contrast was so strong between the vast and immeasurable plenteousness of the harvest, and the fewness and weakness of the labourers, that He alone, who intimately knew the counsels of God, and the methods of their accomplishment, could have regarded it without despair. It was with the certainty that God would carry on to its completion the work which He had begun, that our Saviour, when He marked the contrast, added, "*Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest.*"

The labourers were sent forth, in the first instance, by the Lord Jesus Himself, and invested with extraordinary powers for the effectual discharge of their commission. And they, in turn, sent forth others to continue the work, similarly qualified by the Holy Spirit, while the necessities of the Church required such qualification. And when the Church was firmly planted in the world, and the ordinary means of instruction, blessed by the same Spirit, were sufficient for its maintenance and extension, although the qualifications of the labourers were no longer the same, the authority and obligation of the commission remained unchanged, as long as the work to be done was incomplete; and a succession of labourers was still sent by the Lord of the harvest to plant and water God's

husbandry, and to prepare it for the increase which cometh of the Spirit, and for the maturity of Christian perfectness, and for the great and final ingathering of souls. The work is still in progress; and that Holy Spirit is engaged to forward it. And to the faithful and zealous follower of Jesus Christ it is still a subject of earnest prayer: for when he contemplates the present state of that world, which his Saviour lived to enlighten and died to save; when he measures the actual extent of empire which Christianity has obtained, and the provision made for its security and enlargement, he sees abundant reason to exclaim, with feelings of shame and regret, and painful solicitude, "*The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.*"

We do not lay this matter to heart as we ought. We are not sufficiently alive to the progress of that spiritual dispensation, which must embrace the whole habitable globe; nor consider that if God condescends to employ us, as instruments in the accomplishment of His purposes, its final establishment will be hastened by our diligence, or retarded by our coldness and neglect. How large a portion of that world, which is one day to be covered with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, is still in darkness and the shadow of death! How many of those nations, for whom the Son

of God shed His precious blood, and to whom He commanded His disciples to preach the Gospel of life, are still aliens from the Christian commonwealth, strangers to the covenant of promise, and living without God in the world ! Scarcely more than one-fourth part of the whole population of the earth profess the religion of Jesus Christ. How infinitely more important are these considerations than those of the petty movements and intrigues of international policy ; or even than the great revolutions which disturb the established order of human government. And when will men learn to regard even these, with reference to their bearing upon the final object of all God's providential dispensations, the consolidating of all earthly empires into one great spiritual dominion, when "*all the kingdoms of the world*" shall "*become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ.*"¹

How scanty and inadequate the provision which the subjects of Christ's kingdom have made for extending its boundaries into the dominions of the prince of the power of this world ! Look at the case of our own country. What are we doing for the spiritual good of those nations, over whom we have established our empire, and from whom we derive a part of our wealth ? How are we fulfilling the responsibilities which rest upon us, as agents employed

¹ Revelation xi. 15.

by the Most High for the completion of His great purposes? Can it be denied, or if it be denied, are we not bound to be the more prompt and zealous in asserting it, that the possession of empire is a sacred trust, for the discharge of which its possessors are answerable to the Supreme Ruler of the universe? Can we believe that He takes no note of the plans, and movements, and operations of human governments, with reference to their bearing upon the great object of His providence, the propagation and final triumph of His Gospel? Can we imagine that He regards with complacency, or indifference, our neglect of mighty opportunities and providential openings, for imparting to benighted millions the blessings of saving truth? We have much to answer for as a nation in this respect. But have we not also to answer for some degree of neglect nearer home, in that portion of the Lord's harvest-field which lies immediately around us, where we have no excuse to urge of ignorance or remoteness of interest? Is there not a wide and most important field of evangelical labour in our own country, in the very bosom of our Church? Are there not multitudes, even in this land of light, and inquiry, and benevolence, who faint, and are "*scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd;*" who have only a nominal interest in the benefits of that redemption which Christ wrought for all;

who are perishing of spiritual famine; and in the very citadel and stronghold of Gospel truth are "*taken captives by Satan at his will?*" I speak not here of those, who ostensibly profess Christianity, and observe some of its forms, while they have nothing of its spirit, none of its heart-constraining motives, its rich consolations, its blessed assurances (though even these present a harvest-field for which our labours are required); but I speak of the thousands of poor sinners who have been nurtured in ignorance and vice, knowing the holy name of their Creator only in its profanation; and His Sabbaths only as more convenient opportunities of debauchery and theft. Does it not sometimes happen that our sympathy is awakened for the darkness and degradation of heathen tribes, while multitudes of our own countrymen, our neighbours, the persons who toil for our profit or enjoyment, are perishing for lack of knowledge at our very doors, not tasting so much as the crumbs which fall from our intellectual or spiritual banquet; who, instead of being gathered by our charitable exertions into the garners of the Lord, are "*as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth before it groweth up; wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.*"¹

It is indeed true, that the Lord has sent forth

¹ Psalm cxxix. 6, 7.

labourers into His harvest, and we are, I trust, for the most part, alive to the solemn responsibilities which that mission has laid upon us. But, alas! we are too few, and great need have we to pray, that more may be sent into the harvest. The system of our Established Church is in itself excellent; but it has not gradually expanded with the growth of our population. The plenteousness of the harvest has increased in a tenfold proportion, while the number of the labourers has remained nearly the same. Even within thirty years the population of England and Wales increased from nine to sixteen millions, while not more than perhaps one or two hundred have been added to the number of the Clergy, nor provision made in our churches for more than a tenth part of the additional population. Something has been done by the legislature of this Christian country, recognising for a time the duty incumbent upon it, of making some provision for perpetuating the Christianity of that country. No expenditure of its resources could be more legitimate than that, which went to secure, for the people at large, a stated and unfailing supply of sound religious and moral teaching; to place within their reach the appointed means of grace, and to provide for the gradual diffusion of Christian principles and feelings through the whole mass of the community. We maintain,

that this is the duty of every civil government, as entrusted with the administration of a province of God's universal empire. But were it otherwise, we hold, that it is an essential part of the policy of every wise and humane ruler. For if it be better to prevent crime and disturbance, than to punish it, we would ask, whether any system of preventive police can be devised, so effectual, or so cheap, as that which, by means of religious teaching and example, strikes at the very root of all evil, moral and political, and purifies the stream of human life at the fountain head.

For what has been done by the wise but short-lived munificence of the legislature, we are thankful. And we are thankful that the exertions of associated Christians have almost equalled it in their effects ; so that altogether, more than half a million of additional sittings have been provided for worshippers in our Church. But in the meantime seven millions have been added to the population ; and at the present moment, while the increase of that population is going on at the rate of 300,000 a-year, we are adding,—that is, private exertions, not the government, are adding,—church room for about one-tenth of that number. But there has been by no means a corresponding increase in the number of the Clergy. The labour has been increased in a larger ratio than that of

the labourers; and the actual destitution of religious means which still exists, and is increasing, is of appalling magnitude. Vast masses of the population are still virtually without the pale of the Church, and beyond the reach of its ministry; wholly inaccessible to pastoral care and instruction, sheep without a shepherd, to whom the Word of God is never preached with authority; to whom the message of peace is never delivered, nor the wondrous things of His law made known, nor His sacraments administered. This is of course the description of a state of things which exists principally, though not exclusively, in the great cities and towns of the empire, but preeminently in the metropolis itself; the heart, as it were, of the whole community, from which the pulses of feeling are diffused throughout the entire body politic. But there are many of our rural districts, where considerable numbers of those, for whose salvation Jesus died upon the cross, for whom the offer of pardon and reconciliation was intended, for whose benefit the Church is established; are yet, owing to the circumstances of their locality, almost beyond the reach of these advantages, and in danger of perishing for lack of knowledge. These are the highways and hedges of the world, into which the Lord desires that His servants should be sent forth, to compel those who are loitering there,

to come in and sit down to the marriage supper of His Son.

I dwell particularly upon the want of additional clergymen, because it is not enough to build a church in a particular spot, and to cause divine worship to be solemnized therein at stated times. Important and beneficial as such a provision would be, even if it went no further, it would by no means answer the requirements of the case. It will greatly benefit those who are disposed to go to church, but it will be of no avail to those who are not; to the profane, the careless, the miserably poor; those who are unwilling or ashamed to join in the public worship of God. But every church should have its own district, and its own pastor stationed therein, whose duty it will be, not only to stand on the watch-tower, and to proclaim the messages of pardon, and the law of holiness, to those who may be willing to come and hearken to him; but to carry it forth, with all diligence and earnestness, into every part of his allotted field of labour; to bear the light of the Gospel into the darkest hiding places of ignorance and vice, and its consolations into the most obscure receptacles of indigence and misery; to rescue the younger members of his flock from the fatal consequences of neglect and evil example; to teach the simple, to strengthen the weak, to

drive away error, to declare, to enforce, to exemplify God's truth. This is the method which God Himself has appointed for the accomplishment of His gracious purposes, the sanctification and salvation of mankind; and in the present state and condition of mankind, nothing short of this will effect it. Legislators may enact, magistrates may punish or coerce, and the worst results of human corruption may be prevented, as far as the interests of society are concerned, for a time. But the evil cannot so be cured, nor the disease removed, although its symptoms may be palliated. It is to religion that we must look for the cure; to religion, placed before the people at large, pressed upon their notice, made plain to their understandings, recommended to their affections by all the appliances of human wisdom and charity, blessed by that Holy Spirit who will not desert His own work when taken in hand with sincerity, and carried on with energy, and in humble reliance upon His aid and blessing. It is therefore to the Church, and to the Clergy, that the country is to look for its safety, for by no other instruments can it be imbued with right principles, or kept, as it were, in the precincts of God's favour and the light of His countenance. And I would again assert, in the most emphatic manner, that all attempts at economic reform, all poor-laws, all regulations of police, all systems of reward and

punishment, will be wholly ineffectual, if you do not multiply churches and clergymen, schools and teachers, so as not only to supply the deficiency which now exists, but to keep pace with the growth of the population. These, as they will be the surest, will also in the end be infinitely the cheapest remedy that can be applied to the existing evil. But what if they were the most costly? What if they required from us an outlay of our worldly means tenfold of that which would actually suffice? Would that be a reason for hesitation or delay, or an excuse for backwardness in such a cause—the cause of piety and charity, of truth and virtue, of Christ and of our fellow-creatures? Nay, rather, my brethren, a reason for redoubled zeal and liberality. The work in hand being confessedly of supreme importance, a work concerning the glory of God and the good of men's souls, its costliness or difficulty is plainly a call upon us for more than usual exertion. If it be indeed God's work, a work which He requires to be done, our only inquiry must be how it may be done most speedily and most effectually. Besides which, the true Christian, he who really loves God with any reasonable measures of that love of which the very highest degrees are required of us, is glad to find a distinct and unquestionable opportunity of evincing that love by some efforts of beneficence which may deserve the name of a

sacrifice, and be worthy of being considered as a suitable offering to the King of kings. “*I will not offer,*” said David, “*burnt offerings unto the Lord my God, of that which doth cost me nothing.*”¹ The ordinary emergencies of life do not present opportunities of this kind. The customary charities even of those who are held to be charitable, according to the world’s standard, rarely, if ever, amount to anything like a sacrifice. That which is given in compliance with custom, and without consideration, which is not missed when given, which is less than what is repeatedly expended upon some item of luxury, or even of amusement—this surely is not to be called a sacrifice. It would not be so considered if the cause in hand were one of great secular importance. It would not have been so considered at a time when the danger with which this country was menaced by foreign enemies, called forth all its energies; when its nobility, and gentry, and merchants, came forward with contributions in some degree corresponding to their interest in the common weal. I repeat it, Christians are bound to make some sacrifice for their religion, as an evidence of their love to Christ. But if they are more willing to make such sacrifices for objects of present usefulness, however important, than for those which are of supreme and incomparable moment, are we

¹ 2 Samuel xxiv. 24.

presumptuous or uncharitable if we question the warmth and energy of that love? Suppose an intelligent heathen to visit this metropolis, and to be instructed in the nature of our holy religion; he would be told that men can be saved from the wrath to come only by faith in Christ, bringing forth the fruits of holiness; that they can be brought to Christ only by means of instruction in His Church, and by His sacraments and His ministers; that it is the bounden duty of all His servants to set forward His kingdom by all the means in their power; that we are firmly persuaded of all this, and yet that there are in this great city *more than half a million* of people who are left without the means of profiting by that Church, and its ordinances; that an effort is made by the servants of Christ to rescue that perishing multitude, and to provide for them the means of salvation; and that with great difficulty, and earnest exhortations, and persevering entreaties, a sum is raised, not double in amount of that which has been laid out upon the re-building of a single house of commerce, and less than what is expended on the improvement of a street, the construction of a tunnel, the erection of a receptacle of art; that year by year money is expended upon entertainments, and shows, and pageants, which would build a church, and give the blessings of the Gospel to thousands of benighted sinners.

What would such a person, in the simplicity of his mind and honesty of judgment, think of the sincerity of our profession, of the depth of our convictions, of the genuineness of our Christianity? The tree is judged of by its fruits. But let me not be misunderstood. Do I censure the large and liberal expenditure of money upon objects of usefulness, or magnificence? By no means: the existing order of things may seem to bring with it a necessity for such expenditure; only I would beseech you to remember, that there is no necessity so great as the necessity of doing good; and to bear in mind the spirit of that saying of our blessed Lord, with regard to obligations of greater or less stringency, "*These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*" Let those, whose exertions in their several trades and callings have been crowned by a bountiful Providence with success, remember, that the very same circumstances which have swelled the amount of our population, and created the evil we desire to remedy, have caused in part the increase of their worldly substance; and that to bestow a liberal portion of it upon this object is a peculiarly appropriate offering and expression of thankfulness to God. If they have ministered unto you in carnal things, let them also be partakers of your spiritual things.

Finally, brethren, have you the cause of Christ's Gospel and of man's salvation at heart?

Do you desire the peace of our Sion? Would you ensure the protection of God, and see Jerusalem in prosperity? It is not to be accomplished by desiring and hoping, nor even by praying, if no other means be used. The Lord's harvest must be gathered in by our personal exertions and contributions, and not left, by our indifference and neglect, to be laid waste and desolate by the emissaries of Satan, at all times too numerous and active, and especially so at the present. "*Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*" But remember that he will accomplish that object by instruments and means, yourselves amongst the rest, and that prayer, without sacrifice, will be no better than hypocrisy. Where-soever sin can be prevented, and godliness promoted; wherever ignorance can be instructed, wherever that which is lost, is lost only for want of some one to seek and to save it, there say to yourselves, This is the Lord's harvest. In what way can I forward the in-gathering? How shall I escape the guilt which is fixed upon the lukewarm and careless servant by that sentence of the Lord, "*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.*"¹

¹ St. Matthew xii. 30.

SERMON XXIV.¹

CHURCH EXTENSION ; FOREIGN MISSIONS.

ISAIAH LIV. 2, 3.

Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations : spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes ; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left ; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

THIS encouraging promise may perhaps have been intended, in the first instance, for the Jewish nation, with reference to the increase of their numbers, and the advancement of their power, after their return from captivity. Jerusalem, which had so long lain desolate and barren, might well be exhorted to “*break forth into singing*” at the prospect of her temple rebuilt, her walls restored, and her inhabitants more numerous than they had been in that

¹ See Note at the end of the Volume.

happy time which is signified by the image of the married state; when the Lord, as the Prophet says, was a *husband* to his people:—
“*Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.*”¹ And then follows the exhortation in the text, to make provision for the reception, within her domestic sanctuary, not of those only who should be of her own blood and kindred, but of the Gentiles also, who should be joined to them, and so become, as it were, their portion, or inheritance. But the Jewish nation, after its return from captivity, never attained so remarkable a degree of prosperity and power as fully to answer all the terms of this prophecy. It is true that they became a very numerous people; so that from forty-two thousand, the number of those that went out of Babylon, they had increased to nearly three millions at the time of our Saviour’s death; but they can hardly be said, in respect of territorial limits, to have broken “*forth on the right hand and on the left,*” nor to have “*inherited the Gentiles.*” We must therefore look for another interpretation of the prophecy; and we can be in no doubt as to its application to the Church of God; for St. Paul, in the fourth chapter of his

¹ Isaiah liv. 1.

Epistle to the Galatians, expressly refers the prophecy of Isaiah, of which this is a part, to that "*Jerusalem which is above, which is the mother of us all.*"¹ To this interpretation we are also naturally led, by observing the place which the promise occupies in the prophetical roll. It follows immediately upon a most affecting description of the humiliation and sufferings of the Messiah, concluding with a wonderful prediction of His office as an Atoner and Intercessor. The death of Christ being the life of His Church, it is natural that this melancholy picture of the one should be succeeded by a cheering intimation of the other: the seeming extinction of the light introduces the dawn of a more glorious day. "*He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied,*"² are words of comfort interposed amidst forebodings of suffering and woe; and the mode of their accomplishment is more clearly pointed out by an image drawn from the habits of pastoral life, familiar to the people of eastern countries, where the nomad chief, as his family, and cattle, and goods increase, finds it necessary to "*enlarge the place of*" his "*tent, and*" to "*stretch forth the curtains of*" his "*habitation.*" Under this image is represented the gradual increase of the Church, from the moment when, to human eyes, it appeared to have been crushed by the disgrace

¹ Galatians iv. 26.² Isaiah liii. 11.

and death of its Founder, to the time when "*the fulness of the Gentiles*" shall have "*come in,*" and God's ancient people shall be brought back to the same fold with them, and all "*the kingdoms of this world*" shall "*become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ.*"

No person, probably, has been engaged, of late years at least, in the work of Christian Missions, to whom this prophecy has not frequently recurred, as affording matter both of encouragement and painful anxiety. The certainty of its ultimate fulfilment encourages him in his labour; a comparison of it with the actual state of the world fills him with anxiety and sorrow. He is sure, that what the Lord has spoken He will perform; yet he can hardly refrain from inquiring with the Prophet "*Lord, how long?*"¹ A consideration of this difficulty, which, while it furnishes the unbeliever with an objection to the truth of God's Word, perplexes the reason, although it does not shake the faith, even of His faithful servants, may, under the Divine blessing, suggest some profitable thoughts on the present occasion, when we are met together to attest with thankfulness the past triumphs of the Gospel, and to pray that a more abundant effusion of His Holy Spirit, and a larger measure of success, may be vouchsafed to those who are engaged in the

¹ Isaiah vi. 11.

work of extending the boundaries of Christ's kingdom upon earth.

Our blessed Lord compared that kingdom to a grain of mustard-seed, which, being the smallest of seeds, grows up into a great tree, and the fowls of the air lodge in its branches. As He died for the sins, not only of the apostles and first believers, but of the whole world, it was decreed that His Gospel should be preached to *all nations*; and therefore His Church, by which it is to be preached, and wherein are contained the means of applying the benefits of His death to the salvation of individual sinners, must be essentially expansive in its nature. It was not intended to be, like the Temple of Jerusalem, a local shrine of Deity, one place of sacrifice for a single nation, and of prayer for all; but it must "*break forth on the right hand and on the left*:" it must carry forth its boundaries in all directions, enclosing family after family, and nation after nation, till all the Gentiles become its inheritance, and all the desolate places are inhabited by the children and servants of the Most High.

This expansive character of the Church was abundantly conspicuous in its beginning; when the apostles went forth with a commission to disciple and baptize all nations; and with a special anointing from the Holy Spirit, qualifying them for the execution of their task. The principle of growth and enlargement, which was

essentially inherent in the Church, was put in motion, and made effective, by the direct impulse of the Spirit of God; and the results were proportionably wonderful. Each miracle, wrought in the Name of Jesus, and impressing the stamp of heavenly authority upon the teaching of him who wrought it, was followed by additions to the Church: "*By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people . . . and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women . . . So mightily grew the Word of God, and prevailed.*"¹

We may form some estimate of the power of that preaching of the apostles, from the effect which it produced on one occasion, in causing those who used curious arts, a part only of the numbers who were converted, to bring "*their books together and burn them; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.*"² And so it went on for many years; the power of God being visibly interposed to carry forward on every side the boundaries of His Church. The Gospel broke forth, "*like the breaking forth of waters,*"³ "*on the right hand and on the left.*" "*Its sound went into all the earth, and its words unto the ends of the world.*"⁴ The heavenly vine "*sent out her boughs unto*

¹ Acts v. 12, 14; xix. 20.

² Acts xix. 19.

³ 1 Chron. xiv. 11.

⁴ Rom. x. 18.

“*the sea, and her branches unto the river,*”¹ until the whole known world was planted with Churches, constituted according to the apostolic model. Within little more than a century from the Ascension of our Lord, we find it thus written by one of the earliest Fathers:—“There is no race of men, whether of barbarians or of Greeks, or bearing any other name, either because they live in waggons without fixed habitations, or in tents leading a pastoral life, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Maker of the universe, through the name of the crucified Jesus.”² Within fifty years after that period, we find our own nation enumerated among those which had received the Gospel, in parts inaccessible to the Roman arms; and it is asserted, that in those countries where it had been preached, the Christians formed nearly the greater part of the population. Down to that time, then, the prophecy in the text, and others which speak more plainly still of the universal prevalence of Christianity, and the corresponding extension of the Church, were visibly receiving their fulfilment. The place of God’s tabernacle on earth had been wonderfully enlarged, and its curtains stretched forth; its cords had been lengthened, those cords of Divine love, by which the Holy Spirit draws

¹ Psalm lxxx. 11.

² Justin Martyr, *Dial. cum Tryph.*

men within the sphere of His influence, and adds to the Church daily such as may be saved therein ; its stakes were strengthened ; numbers were added to the ministry, the pillars of the Church, as the apostles and prophets are its foundations, “ *Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone.*”

But before many ages had passed away the scene was sadly changed. The efforts of Satan to regain a portion at least of the dominion, which had been won from him by the noble army of martyrs and confessors, were but too successful. Heresy and schism weakened the stakes of the tabernacle ; superstition removed them, and substituted for them false and unsubstantial supports ; and then its cords were slackened, and its curtains were shaken and torn by the blast. Many cities were reduced to spiritual desolation ; and the awful warning, which the Spirit had sent to the Churches, began to receive its fulfilment ; the witnesses were slain ; and the Church herself was driven into the wilderness ; and it was no longer a question whether she should enlarge the place of her habitation, but whether she should have any earthly habitation at all, except in name and shadowy form. Then might she have taken up the complaint of Jeremiah : “ *My tabernacle is spoiled, and all my cords are broken : my children are gone forth of me, and they are not : there is none to*

*“ stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up
“ my curtains. For the pastors are become
“ brutish, and have not sought the Lord : there-
“ fore they shall not prosper, and all their flocks
“ shall be scattered.”*¹ And since the time when
some portion of the Church’s ancient glory re-
turned, and in those regions where her light has
shone with somewhat of its early purity and
brightness, how little apparent cause has she
had for responding to the prophetic call, *“ Sing,
“ O barren, thou that didst not bear ; break forth
“ into singing, and cry aloud ; ”* seeing how little
has been done, by those who have dwelt in her
sanctuary, to enlarge its place, and to stretch
forth the curtains of her habitation. How dark
and painful is the contrast, of the glorious and
rapid march of Christianity during the first two
centuries, not only with the extinction of its
light in some Churches, and its obscurity and
dimness in others, but with the efforts, made
by those who have been charged with the duty
of maintaining and propagating the faith, to
recover the territories which once belonged to
Christ’s kingdom, and to achieve fresh conquests
over the powers of darkness in regions hitherto
unblessed with Gospel light !

While the warfare was waged by a few despised
and persecuted men, the Church was every-
where triumphant, as far as its visible extension

¹ Jer. x. 20, 21.

denoted triumph ; but when the whole empire was comprised within its pale, and entire nations professed the faith, its expansive energy began to wax faint, and even its self-preserving principle was at times scarcely kept alive ; and now, when vast regions of the earth are waiting for the evangelist, how few labourers are sent forth by that portion of the Universal Church, which is rich in spiritual treasure and worldly means, to put the sickle into the great harvest of souls ! It is accounted a great thing, if a few idolaters or unbelievers, a single family, or perhaps a village, are reported to have embraced the truth as it is in Jesus.

Indeed, it is a palpable objection, and is urged as such, against the truth of those prophecies, which portray in such glowing imagery the state of the world under the reign of the Messiah, that the reality by no means corresponds with the description ; that more than three-fourths of the human race are now, after the lapse of eighteen centuries, outcasts and aliens from the Christian Covenant ; and that there are no symptoms of the arrival, within any determinable time, of that blessed state of things which shall prevail, when “ *all* ” men “ *shall know the Lord, from the least of them unto the greatest.* ”¹

Undoubtedly this apparent retrocession in the

¹ Jer. xxxi. 34.

fulfilment of God's purposes of mercy is a trial of our faith, as it is probably a punishment for the want of it. Those purposes are thwarted and hindered by the perverseness of man, who is not only the object of them, but is made to be instrumental in their fulfilment; and because, in consequence, the Almighty appears to be "*slack, as some men count slackness,*" in the accomplishment of His designs, this is urged as an argument against the truth of those predictions by which He has prepared mankind for the fuller development of His counsels. It is also urged as a reason for our leaving the work of evangelization altogether in the hands of God, and desisting from that labour which has produced so little apparent fruit. Indeed, the scantiness of the harvest would give us but slender encouragement to persevere in sowing beside all waters, did we not remember that the duty has been laid upon us by Him, who knows our insufficiency, and will supply it as He sees fit. The work is clearly ours; the increase will be given by Him, in such proportions, and at such times, as Infinite Wisdom and Goodness may determine.

The dispensation of Gospel truth, and the building up, though perhaps by slow and painful increase, the Church of Christ, is the work committed to our hands; and though its progress may be scarcely perceptible, there may be in

connexion, or at least simultaneous therewith, a secret underworking of God's providence, which will manifest itself in due time, and prove that our "*labour is not in vain in the Lord.*" And although this state of things ought to teach us our own weakness, and the impotence of all human efforts, as compared with the energy of that Almighty Spirit who moves up and down in the world, and is the life of the Universe and of the Church, it should prevent us from yielding to disappointment and despondency; and drive us, not to a relaxation of our efforts, but to more persevering prayer, and to a more entire resignation, as to the issue of our labours, to Him for whose glory they are designed. To those who lose sight of this principle, motives to despondency and inaction present themselves, not only in the seeming inefficacy of all human efforts to convert the heathen world, but in the state of things which exists in Christendom itself, in the very bosom of the Reformed Church, in the midst of this land of light and privileges. Are there not in our crowded cities and towns whole classes of people whose occupations and habits entirely cut them off from all the opportunities of spiritual improvement; who are wholly inaccessible to the Church's ministrations and pastoral care; whom the utmost ingenuity of charity cannot devise the means of bringing within the scope of Christian

teaching and spiritual influence? We cannot traverse the streets of this vast metropolis, without seeing enough to make our heart faint within us, and almost despair of our Church and country, were it not for an immovable persuasion, built upon the sure promises of God, that the prospect, now so dark and cheerless, will, in His own good time, be illumined with the brightness of hope, and at length shine "*more and more unto the perfect day.*"

The effects which were actually produced by the first preaching of the Gospel are a sufficient pledge and earnest of the complete and literal fulfilment of prophecy in God's fore-appointed time: and the actual results, which have followed the proclamation of Divine truth, even in later ages, have been such as may assure us, that although the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit may no longer reside in the Church, the blessing of God will not be withholden, in due proportion and degree, from those who in faith and singleness of heart set themselves to the work of conversion.

Let no man object, that all *our* endeavours to effect any considerable enlargement of the Saviour's kingdom will, and must, be vain and fruitless; that "*the fulness of time*" is not yet come; that God will do His own work when it shall seem Him good. The exact "*times of restitution of all things*" are, we may well believe, purposely left uncertain to our appre-

hension, in order that we may not grow careless, nor relax in our endeavours to establish our Master's kingdom. Whatsoever is wrought by the direct and special agency of God Himself is certain in its operation and results. That which is left to the agency of man, availing himself, or not, of the ordinary gifts of the Spirit, is partial and fluctuating, although it may have a sure, yet unforeseen tendency to a fixed and predetermined end. Almighty God, in His moral government, works by instruments and means : and we cannot know in what degree those instruments may be permitted to accelerate or retard the accomplishment of His designs. But it is easy to believe, that if the existing Church of Christ were what it once was, and what it ought ever to be, one in spirit and in action, as it is in essence ; if all who profess "*one Lord, one faith, one baptism,*" were also united in one holy bond of love, the love of Christ and of their brethren ; if all were to betake themselves, with one heart and one voice, in fervent, persevering supplication to the God and Father of all, for a more abundant outpouring of His Spirit, and for the speedy coming of His kingdom ; and if all would devote themselves to bring about the fulfilment of that prayer, according to their opportunities and means, casting into the Church's treasury, as their contribution to that work, a due proportion of their worldly substance ; it is

easy, I say, to believe, that such desire, such earnestness, could not fail of producing a wonderful effect, in extending the limits of Christ's Church, and in hastening the triumph of His Gospel. If such a glorious spectacle could be presented to the observation of an unbelieving world, the work of conversion would no doubt proceed far more rapidly than it now does; men would become Christians by tribes and nations; and "*the fulness of the Gentiles*" might be expected to come in. But, alas! how different from such a state of things is the actual condition of the Church! Can it excite surprise that the progress of the Gospel in the enlightening of the heathen world is slow, and uncertain, and almost disheartening, in our days, when among those who have embraced it there is so much dissension; so much forgetfulness of their duties, as members of that one mystical body which has Christ for its Head; so much jealousy of the interference of His spiritual kingdom with the policy of civil government; so much inconsistency between the preaching of the Christian Missionary and the lives of his own countrymen, who profess to believe the truths which he proclaims, but utterly neglect the duty of adorning and recommending them by a visible display of their efficacy; unconscious, or forgetful, of the solemn truth, that every Christian, dwelling in the midst of unbelievers, is charged with the

office of a Missionary, and is bound to preach to them, either by his doctrine or his life ?

We do not wonder that some zealous and fervid minds, struck by the fearful contrast between the actual state of the Christian world in this respect, and that which ought to characterise the Lord's people, should have been led to expect some special interposition of Divine power, some extraordinary operation of the Holy Spirit, to counteract the effect of man's apathy and sinfulness, and to hasten the coming of the Lord's kingdom. And it would be presumptuous to deny that this, after all, may be the method to which God will resort for the completion of His designs of mercy. It may be, that if the ordinary influences of the Holy Spirit in the Church are unimproved and neglected by His servants, the Lord Himself shall come, and all the saints with Him ; and "*by fire and by sword*" "*will the Lord plead with all flesh ;*"¹ He will make "*bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations ; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.*"²

But the possibility of such a consummation is no reason why we should slacken our exertions to carry forward the Church's work ; the progress of which may depend, in what degree we know not, upon those exertions, put forth in undoubting reliance upon the Spirit who helpeth

¹ Isaiah lxvi. 16.

² Ibid. lii. 10.

all our infirmities, and crowned by Him with such a measure of success as may seem good to Him: "*not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.*"¹

An entire trust in the power of that Holy Spirit to accomplish His own purposes by no means excludes the necessity, nor exempts us from the duty, of using all the instrumental means which He has provided in His Church. The neglect or misuse of them, if they are of Divine appointment, cannot be consistent with His will, even if it could by possibility hasten the display of His power in the conversion of the world. But let us never forget that they are only instrumental; and that in the faithful use of them we shall be most likely to succeed, when we place our dependence, not upon them, nor upon any subordinate agency, but upon "*the blessed and only Potentate,*"² whose we are, and in whose might alone we can triumph. It deserves our serious consideration, whether, in the fervour of a newly-kindled zeal for the cause of Christ, and under the excitement of new undertakings, having in view such unspeakably interesting objects, we have not been insensibly led to think too much of the grandeur and efficacy of the means employed by us; and to magnify the instruments, instead of looking humbly and hopefully to the Hand which alone can

¹ Zech. iv. 6.

² 1 Timothy vi. 15.

wield them with success. We think and speak so much of the machinery which we set to work, our apparatus of Societies and Missionaries, and Churches, and Schools, that we are apt to ascribe to them an efficacy not their own ; and to forget how utterly worthless and inefficient they are, without the direct intervention of God Himself. Let us rest assured, that the more humbly we think of ourselves, and of our exertions and labours, even in the holiest cause, the more surely we may calculate upon success, and the less will be our disappointment, if success should be withheld from us.

I have already observed, that the possibility, which cannot be denied, of God's having reserved the complete establishment of His kingdom upon earth for a special and manifest interposition of His own power, is not a sufficient reason why we should relax our endeavours to hasten that blessed consummation. But of one thing we should be thoroughly persuaded ; that if those endeavours are to be in any measure successful, it can only be by the direct and continued influences of His Holy Spirit. No power but His can take away the veil from the hearts of those benighted millions, who are blinded, not only by the delusions of a polytheism, which throws the charm of voluptuousness over the dark intricacies of superstition, but by the deceitful perplexities of a subtle and refined philosophy. I allude

more particularly to that vast field of Missionary labour which is opened to us in our Eastern Empire. With some of the less civilized of the heathen tribes the Missionary's task may seem to be more promising. The simplicity of the Gospel may be more likely to find access to their untutored, and, in one sense, unperverted minds; but neither in their case will anything effectual be done in the way of conversion, without the unceasing aid of the Holy Spirit, nor, consequently, without a strong and lively faith in the certainty of that aid, leading to earnest prayer, that the Lord will accomplish the number of His elect, and hasten His kingdom.

But singleness of purpose, and earnestness in prayer, indispensable as they are to the success of every effort to extend the limits of the Redeemer's kingdom, must be accompanied by the faithful use of those instruments and means which He Himself has appointed for the conversion of the world. "*The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God,*" must be taken from the Church's armoury, and wielded by those who are specially ordained to that work. If, as St. Paul declares, while speaking of his mission to "*preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,*"¹ it is God's intention that not only unto them, but "*unto the principalities and powers in*

¹ Ephesians iii. 8.

“*heavenly places, might be known*¹ *by the Church the manifold wisdom of God,*”² it is clearly our duty to work in and by the Church, in our endeavour to communicate the blessedness of that knowledge to the heathen. And as the Church’s office of teaching is specially committed to the ministry, we must employ that ministry in its completeness and integrity, as we believe it to have been constituted by the apostles, “*for the perfecting of the saints for the edifying of the body of Christ.*” It can hardly be questioned, that the slow and uncertain progress of evangelization in some parts of the world, the failure and abandonment of missions, have been, in some measure, occasioned by the individual and desultory nature of those missionary enterprises, which have had no connexion with what we believe to be a divinely-appointed order of Church government, and have wanted its authority, its restraints, its sympathies, and its supports. We are warranted in this supposition, not only by the consideration, that if there be an order of Church government having the stamp of apostolical authority, its absence must be an impediment to the preaching of the Gospel to the heathen; but by the increased measure of success in that work, which has followed the establishment of Colonial Bishoprics.

¹ i. e. *made known* (γνωρισθῆναι).

² Ephesians iii. 10.

Compare the time, when four clergymen only of the Church of England were found in the whole continent of America, and not one bishop in any of our Colonial possessions (for such was the case at the end of the seventeenth century), with the present era of the Church's awakened energies. In the United States thirty-two bishops, and one thousand five hundred and fifty-seven clergy; in our own colonies and dependencies, where, at the close of the eighteenth century, only two bishoprics had been erected, and where twelve years ago there were but eight, we can now count with gladness twenty-four, and can look with confident hope to a speedy increase of that number. We may not rest satisfied till all the members of our Church, in whatever quarter of the globe they may have fixed their households, shall be within reach of all the means of grace to which that membership entitles them, and enjoy the benefits of apostolical order and discipline, as well as that of Scriptural teaching. Although the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel cannot claim the exclusive praise of establishing the Colonial Churches in their integrity, it suggested, encouraged, and assisted the undertaking; and the Colonial Bishoprics Fund may justly be accounted an offset, God be praised, a flourishing offset, from this parent stock. And, truly, it rejoices one's heart to see the

mutual inter-dependence and cooperation of the two. If the Society provides a maintenance for the clergy of an infant Church, the bishop to whom its oversight is committed, speedily multiplies the numbers of those clergymen, in some instances three and four fold ; builds churches and schools, founds colleges, forms Church societies, completes the machinery by which the Church may best work out the purposes of her institution, gives to it an impulse, which no other moving power could impart, and directs its movements with an authority, superior to all human laws, as to its essence, while it conforms to them in all things not contrary to the law of Christ.

The enlargement of the Church follows rapidly upon its perfect organization. In the extension of the Colonial Episcopate, we have the surest pledge of success in our increased efforts to provide the means of edification and grace for our brethren who are of the household of faith, and to cause the light of the world to shine upon those heathen tribes who are connected with us, whether by conquest or by commerce. In the lands where the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel has laboured, where, a century and a half ago, there were scarcely a dozen clergymen of the Church of England, there are now two thousand seven hundred and fifty under the government of fifty-seven bishops, dispensing

the Word of God and the sacraments of His grace to three millions of souls in communion with a reformed Episcopal Church.

Again, let us turn our eyes with thankfulness and hope to New Zealand, and the Polynesian World, where the Church, which now exists there in the integrity of its apostolical constitution, was founded and built up by the Church Missionary Society; and let us rejoice in the success of its labours, pursuing as it does the same holy objects by the same legitimate means. A similar blessing has been vouchsafed to that branch of the Church in Africa, which has long been fostered by the maternal care of the Church Missionary Society, under circumstances of great difficulty and trial. If there be any part of the heathen world which in an especial degree deserves our sympathy, and to which we are pre-eminently bound to impart the privileges of the Gospel and the Church, it is surely that country, of whose children we were so long the guilty oppressors. What cause for thanksgiving to Him, "*who hath made of one blood all nations of men,*" is to be found in the thought, that He has not only blessed our labours by bringing many of those neglected and persecuted people to the knowledge of a Saviour; but that, from among a race who were despised as incapable of intellectual exertion and acquirement, He has raised up men, well qualified, even in point

of knowledge, to communicate to others the saving truths which they themselves have embraced, and to become preachers of the Gospel to their brethren according to the flesh. I speak this the more feelingly, as having been myself privileged to admit to the holy order of priesthood, after due examination, more than one native of Africa; and to send them forth into the Lord's vineyard, strong in the faith of Christ, armed with the knowledge of His Word, and animated by all the sympathies of brotherhood toward the objects of their missionary labours.

In these events, as also in the open exertion of our influence, as a nation, for the protection of Christians from the cruelty of unbelieving persecutors; in the gradual loosening of the great fabric of Mahomedan superstition; in the spirit of inquiry which has been awakened among God's ancient people; in the sudden growth of the Church in some districts of our Indian Empire; in the opening made for the Gospel by our recent alliance with the vast Empire of China; we discern enough to excite our hopes, and to encourage us to perseverance; streaks of light in the horizon of that darkness which still shrouds so large a portion of the world; harbingers, we humbly trust, of a coming, though perhaps distant day, when "*the glory of the Lord shall be seen,*" upon

the people; "*and the Gentiles shall come to His light, and kings to the brightness of His rising.*"¹ It may still be reserved for our Church—I devoutly and soberly believe that it is reserved for her—to be, in a sense, subordinate to the prerogative of her glorified Head, the Light of the world; I believe that unto her, imperfect as she may be, "*is this grace given, that*" she "*should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.*"²

But let us not forget that the success of great exertions will be the condemnation of future inactivity. Indeed, we have great need to be careful not to indulge in feelings of exultation, as though we had done the whole of our duty. While we praise God for what He has graciously enabled us to do in His cause, let us humbly and sorrowfully confess, how much more we ought to have done; and pray that He will open the eyes of all His servants to the real nature and extent of their Christian responsibility; that the inhabitants of a country so favoured with worldly blessings, and opportunities of good, and especially the members of a Church so providentially reformed and protected, may turn an attentive ear to the cry which may well be imagined to go forth from millions of benighted heathens, objects

¹ Isaiah lx. 3.

² Ephesians iii. 8.

like themselves of Redeeming Love, but perishing for want of some to seek and to save them.

If ever there was a time, when the servants of Jesus Christ could innocently stand aloof from the work of evangelizing the world, *this* surely is not the time. But this *is* a time, if ever there has been a time, since the first uttering of the awful sentence, when the lukewarm disciple of the Saviour may well be reminded of those words, of fearful application to every neglected opportunity of advancing the cause of His Gospel ; “ *He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth.* ”

May that gracious and merciful Lord, who desires the salvation of all men, be pleased to multiply the number of His faithful labourers, and their success in turning many to righteousness ! May He pour down upon them the dews of the Spirit, and strengthen their hands to the casting down of idolatry, the conviction of unbelief, and the building up and enlargement of His Church ! May He dispose the heart of all His servants to assist them in gathering together the aliens and the outcasts into its fold ; and may He give us grace to consider the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions ; and heal our intestine wounds, and guide us by His Holy Spirit to

set an example to the world, of what may be done towards extending His kingdom, and establishing the reign of truth and love, by a Church which holds the faith in the unity of Spirit and in the bond of peace, and is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone. Let us hold the faith in that *unity of the Spirit*, and in that *bond of peace*, and seek to impart it to others, *as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*, by methods of His own appointment, and we cannot altogether fail of success. If we labour as though all depended upon ourselves, and yet with a consciousness of our own insufficiency, with much self-mistrust, and with earnest prayer, leaving the issue to Him whose glory we desire to promote, we shall not be wholly disappointed; our *labour will not be in vain in the Lord*. We shall have hastened, though by degrees to us perhaps imperceptible, the coming of that time of light and blessedness, which may be delayed for a season by the negligence or perverseness of a sinful world, but must finally dawn upon it; when the borders of the Church's tabernacle shall be commensurate with the limits of the habitable globe: "*and the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth*" shall "*bring their glory*

*“and honour into it;”*¹ and its *“gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night:”* and men *“shall call its walls Salvation, and”* its *“gates Praise.”*²

¹ Rev. xxi. 24.

² Isaiah lx. 11, 18.

NOTES.

NOTE TO SERMON XXIII.

THE Sermon, to which this note refers, was written by Bishop Blomfield when he commenced his work of Church Extension by organizing the "Metropolis Churches Fund" in the year 1836. The arguments employed in this Sermon are now familiar to many; but at the time he wrote they were little heeded, except by the few zealous and thoughtful men, who, with the Bishop, mourned over the fearful spiritual destitution of London—fearful in its effects on those who were living and dying "without hope and without God in the world," and in its results to society and the Church. It is difficult to realize what would have been the present condition of the metropolis if the great work, which this sermon advocates, had not been set on foot, and blessed by God with so large a measure of success. It is perhaps not too much to say that we should be now drifting helplessly on the strong tides of popular irreligion, and that the foundations of society would be in the utmost peril. In his Sermon the Bishop states that the population of England was then increasing at the rate of 300,000 a year; but he does not there mention that 30,000 of that annual increase belonged to London alone; a number which has gradually risen to above 50,000 yearly.¹ When this sermon was written, the population of the Metropolitan District was but 1,800,000; it has now reached nearly 3,000,000 souls. There are now, therefore, at least 1,000,000 more in the London Diocese than when the Bishop put forth his first appeal; more than double the number which he then stated to be in excess of the Church's

¹ The Registrar-General computes the present annual increase in the Metropolitan District at the almost incredible amount of 60,000.

spiritual provision ; and for which he proposed to erect fifty churches, though he felt even this to be a very inadequate supply. This scheme, which the Duke of Wellington, not wont to over-estimate difficulties, termed "impossible," and Dr. Chalmers, "a devout imagination, which could never be realized," was, through the blessing of God, executed far beyond its proposed dimensions. The Bishop's Appeals and his example, aided by the zealous exertions and large sacrifices of many devoted persons, obtained between the years 1836 and 1854 voluntary offerings to the Metropolis Churches Fund, which, with local contributions, amounted to 580,000*l.* ; besides twelve churches wholly built by individuals, including one built by the Bishop himself. To this must be added 80,000*l.* raised for the parish of Bethnal Green, in which District alone, in the course of ten years, ten churches were erected, one of them at the sole charge of Mr. William Cotton ; to whom, more than to any layman of our time, the cause of Metropolitan Church Extension is indebted. *Seventy-eight additional churches* were thus erected by the year 1854 ; when, the original purpose of the Metropolis Churches Fund having been more than accomplished, that Fund was brought to a close, and the "London Diocesan Church Building Society" took its place. It is to this Association that we must look, under God, for the continuance of the great work which Bishop Blomfield commenced three-and-twenty years ago.

When he resigned the See of London in the Autumn of 1856, he could number *one hundred and ninety-seven churches* added to those which he found when he entered on that See in 1828. But if *he* could look back with satisfaction, *we* have still to look forward with anxiety and alarm. As regards the excess of population over the means of grace, London is in the same, if not in a worse position, than when the Bishop put forth his Appeal in 1836 ; there are at least 1,000,000 souls who are without due religious provision. We have done nothing yet to remedy the original evil ; we have hardly kept pace with the yearly demands on our charity, its arrears have never been discharged ; and now the great waterfloods of irreligion are again advancing upon us,

and hemming us in on every side. We cannot look to the Legislature for any public grant towards the removal of this dangerous evil: nor must we deceive ourselves into hoping that any temporary expedients, such as Missionary Preachings, Special Services, and Missionary Colleges, can produce permanent results: useful as preparatives of pastoral superintendence, they will become positively injurious if not succeeded by regular means of grace. It is only by our parochial organization enlarged and multiplied, that our Reformed Church can reclaim and retain the heathen multitudes of this country; and lay her foundations—the foundations of Scriptural truth, and sober piety—in the hearts of the people. To this object Bishop Blomfield devoted his great abilities, his high position, and his large revenues; for this he spent life itself: it would indeed bode ill to our Church, and to religion in this land, if the spirit which he kindled were now to languish.

I may be pardoned if I have presumed to add so much, to what he has more forcibly urged in his Sermon, in advocating a cause, sacred indeed to every Christian by its high and awful claims, but to me peculiarly endeared by my father's labours and example.

F. G. B.

NOTE TO SERMON XXIV.

THIS Sermon was preached on more than one occasion for both the Great Missionary Societies of our Church. As it has been printed, though not separately published, by the Church Missionary Society, I have been careful to omit nothing which refers specially to that Society's work; while, out of the remarks on the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, I regret that I could only find space for those which speak of the

extension of the Colonial Episcopate. This work, however, is the noblest monument of that Society's labours, as it undoubtedly is the surest guarantee, under God, of the permanence and growth of our Church in foreign lands. I may venture to inform those who are not acquainted with the history of that extension, how much it is indebted to Bishop Blomfield's exertions. The principle that no foreign branch of our Church can be securely rooted without episcopal superintendence had indeed been long recognised in theory ; but the Bishop was the first to call that principle into vigorous and systematic action. It had been asserted by the Church's rulers in the middle of the seventeenth century, but was never acted on till one hundred and fifty years after, when the first Colonial Bishop was consecrated ; while, up to the year 1840, there were but nine Bishops in our vast foreign possessions. Yet, in only six years from that time, this number was doubled. If it be asked what originated the movement, which thus effected in six years what it had previously taken two centuries to accomplish, we must point to the Appeal which, in the year 1840, was made by Bishop Blomfield, in a letter to Archbishop Howley, for the erection of Bishoprics in every Colonial Dependency and Missionary District ; " an appeal so stirring " (to use the words of the late venerable Bishop Inglis) " that it moved the hearts of the whole Church." The effect of this Appeal showed itself in the following year, when the work was taken in hand by the Archbishops and Bishops, and was pressed forward by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel with untiring zeal, and with individual instances of splendid liberality. To the furtherance of this great design Bishop Blomfield devoted his unremitting attention, until his labours were cut short. So blessed was the work beyond all expectation, that in ten years from the issuing of his Appeal, sixteen Bishoprics were added ; a number which has still continued steadily to advance, so that by the year 1860 we may hope to have forty English Bishoprics in foreign lands. And there is reasonable ground for hoping that the Colonial Episcopate, with its army of subordinate Clergy, will now increase in nearer proportion to the Church's requirements. How much has yet to be done is evident from the fact that there is in the

Foreign Possessions and Dependencies of Great Britain a population of nearly 145,000,000 ; and that in this vast harvest-field there are now (February, 1859) but thirty-five Bishops and 1,404 Clergy. Yet if, through Divine grace, we can but imitate the example of the last twenty years, this generation may behold our Reformed Church planted, in all the integrity of its Apostolic Institutions, and in all the efficiency of an adequate Ministry, in every land which the King of kings has given to our empire, and in the darkest places of heathen dominion. "My own deeply-rooted conviction," so Bishop Blomfield concluded his remarkable Appeal, "my own deeply-rooted conviction is, that if the Church of England bestir herself in good earnest, and put forth all the resources and energies which she possesses, and for the use of which she must give account, she will in due time cause the Reformed Episcopal Church to be recognised by all the nations of the earth, as the stronghold of pure religion, and the legitimate dispenser of its means of grace ; and will be a chosen instrument in the hands of God, for purifying and restoring the other branches of Christ's Holy Catholic Church ; and of connecting them with herself, as members of the same mystical body, in the way of truth, in the unity of the Spirit, and in the bond of peace." May the Lord confirm these words of His servant.

F. G. B.

THE END.



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